Historicizing the Religious Field

Adapting Theories of the Religious Field for the Study of Medieval and Early Modern Europe

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Abstract

As historians of religion are currently diagnosing a need to find new shared frameworks and new narratives enabling interdisciplinary and trans-epochal exchange, the article suggests a closer historical engagement with theories of the “religious field”, originally formulated by Pierre Bourdieu on the basis of Max Weber’s work, as this theory has the potential to serve as a meta-language for interdisciplinary communication. The article sets out the most important elements of the theory of the religious field, and evaluates them critically by way of a historicization of important concepts, drawing on recent discussions in sociology and Religious Studies. After discussing the concept of the religious field itself, the article discusses several internal dynamics of the field (as suggested by Bourdieu and by more recent research) as well as several typical dynamics between fields. It concludes with suggestions for historical adaptations, including an updated approach to religious plurality and to the different types of religious actors envisaged by Weber and Bourdieu.

Keywords

religious field – sociology of religion – theory of history – history of religion – Religious Studies – religious plurality – Pierre Bourdieu

1 The Quest for Long-Term Frameworks in the Interdisciplinary History of Religion¹

Historians of religion in pre-modern Europe—and especially historians of Christianity—are currently participating in a broader historical debate about theoretical frameworks and periodizations. In our fields, this debate clearly forms part of the ongoing transformation of an older, Christocentric and institution-oriented “church history” into a broader cultural history of religion—or history of religious culture, or religious history—in Europe and beyond.² In particular, historians need to formulate revised periodizations and narratives, in order to replace—rather than just criticize—the well-worn trajectories and teleologies of the older grand narratives of national and confessional identities.³

- 1 This article forms part of the thematic section “The Religious Field during the Long Fifteenth Century,” as described in the introduction above. For this article, I gratefully acknowledge a debt to three overlapping research contexts which have enabled me to embark on this interdisciplinary endeavour, COST Action IS1301 “New Communities of Interpretation. Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe” (described above, in the introduction) and the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics in Pre-Modern and Modern Europe” at the University of Münster, which co-hosted and co-funded the workshop underlying this publication. The publication was co-funded by my own research project “Diversitas religionum. Thirteenth-century foundations of European discourses of religious diversity,” funded as a Diltney Fellowship by the Volkswagen Foundation. I would like to add individual thanks to Andreas Pietsch as co-convenor of the workshop as well as to Astrid Reuter, Theo Riches, Jon Vidar Sigurdsson, and Christina Brauner, and the authors of this theme section—Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet, Ian Johnson, Rob Lut-ton, and Elisabeth Salter—for their comments and engagement.
- 2 See especially Christine Caldwell Ames, “Medieval Religious, Religions, Religion,” *History Compass* 10 (2012), 334–352; Alexandra Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy: Explaining Religious Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44 (2014), 241–280; Fred van Lieburg, “In Saecula Saeculorum. Long-Term Perspectives on Religious History,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 98, 3/4 (2018), 319–343 and John van Engen, “The Future of Medieval Church History,” *Church history* 71 (2002), 492–522. In using different terms—such as “religious history,” “history of religion” or “history of religious culture”—for different strands of related research, this article attempts to accommodate a truly international discussion in which terms are by no means homogeneous. In anglophone research, “history of religion” has been used for the history of ancient and non-Christian religions, whereas “religious history” has been used for Christianity, so the latter term is typically used here. But together with occasional other terms (and references to “historians of religion”) it is employed in the broad sense referring to the study of any form of religiosity.
- 3 On these issues, see Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy” (see above, n. 2); ead., “The Reformation and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008), 497–528; Van Lieburg, “In Saecula Saeculorum” (see above, n. 2).

Among scholars with a historical specialization, this debate is driven by (at least) two different issues: Among historians generally, it has recently been emphasized that we need new frameworks that allow the writing of long-term histories, as several factors have combined to produce a widespread “short-termism” and a degree of specialization that is beginning to undermine the relevance of history as a discipline. As Jo Guldi and David Armitage point out, the specialization of current historical work is largely due to external factors, such as the economization of scholarly work within academia.⁴ For the religious history of medieval and early modern Europe in particular, Alexandra Walsham has furthermore given a trenchant analysis of reasons and factors encouraging a widespread focus on the short-term. She points out the inbuilt tendency of culturalist and constructivist perspectives to focus on the micro-historical level in order to deconstruct older grand narratives—but she also underlines that this self-restriction is by no means programmatic or unavoidable. All this has resulted in debates about new forms of *longue durée* history, with suggestions ranging from new narrative models and metaphors to histories of transcultural entanglement or histories of materials and commodities, and finally to “data modeling” based on Digital Humanities methodology.

Secondly, this situation puts pressure on scholars of religion to engage in interdisciplinary exchange, particularly with Religious Studies, but also between the different sub-fields of research on religion during the medieval and early modern periods—not only studies focusing on Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or other religions, but also the many disciplinary specializations of history, art history, literature, philosophy, and so on.⁵ Most of these research fields have in turn developed fragmented subfields, and, lacking shared methodologies, theories, and long-term perspectives, experience problems in establishing meaningful communication with each other.

4 See the forceful statement by Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2014), the term “short-termism” there 2, on specialization there 5–10. For medieval and early modern history, see especially Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy” (see above, n. 2). See also the section “On The History Manifesto,” *American Historical Review* 120.2 (2015), 530–542 and recently, John H. Arnold, Matthew Hilton, and Jan Rüger, “The Challenges of History,” in *History after Hobsbawm. Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. John H. Arnold, Matthew Hilton, and Jan Rüger (Oxford, 2018), 3–14, esp. 5–11.

5 See esp. Ames, “Medieval religious” (see above, n. 2), esp. 341–342; Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy” (see above, n. 2), *passim*. My observations here are heavily indebted to the discussions which took place within the COST Action IS1301 network, but also in the “New Religious Histories” network during IMC Leeds sessions from 2014 onwards and the “New Religious Histories” conference at Oxford 2018 (co-organized by Emilia Jamrozziak, Amanda Power, and myself).

Against this backdrop, the present article argues that there is one area which might be of great benefit for historians of religion pursuing interdisciplinary exchange—a stronger engagement with recent trends in the sociology of religion, particularly several recent adaptations of theories of “the religious field.”

The theory of the religious field contains several elements which might allow historians to frame long-term histories—and it provides a potential meta-language in which scholars from different humanities and social science disciplines may discuss these shared horizons. In its core an actor-oriented theory of society as a whole, and thus a macro-historical theory, it can also be adapted to the micro-historical level of study typically preferred by scholars working historically. More importantly, its central metaphors allow historians to connect many different aspects of historical religion: Framing historical dynamics as negotiations on the religious field can account for different forms of religious plurality without denying religious persecution, violence and othering. It allows historians to trace both dynamics within and between religious communities. As a theory of differentiation, the theory of the religious field also enables the framing of dynamics of sacralization and de-sacralization, and of the various interrelations between religion and other fields, such as politics, art, law, or medicine. As the theoretical model is decidedly concerned with the social, however, it should be stated up-front that it is of little interest for the study of individual, inner experiences of religion and their cognitive and psychological foundations.

The theory of the religious field was originally developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, but it has recently undergone several interesting elaborations and interpretations within the fields of sociology of religion and Religious Studies. The present article draws particularly on research by the sociologists Philip S. Gorski and David Swartz and by the Religious Studies scholars Terry Rey, Astrid Reuter, and Nikolas Broy.⁶ As I would like to argue, this theory

6 Throughout the following, I draw on the interpretations of Bourdieu's work by Philip S. Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory and Historical Analysis. Maps, Mechanisms and Methods,” in *Pierre Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. idem (Durham, London, 2013), 327–366; David Swartz, “Metaprinciples for Sociological Research in a Bourdieusian Perspective,” in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. Philip S. Gorski (Durham, 2013), 19–35; Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* [Key thinkers in the study of religion] (London, 2007); Astrid Reuter, “Charting the Boundaries of the Religious Field: Legal Conflicts over Religion as Struggles over Blurring Borders,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 2 (2009), 1–20; ead., *Religion in der verrechtlichten Gesellschaft: Rechtskonflikte und öffentliche Kontroversen um Religion als Grenzarbeiten am religiösen Feld* [Critical Studies in Religion 5] (Göttingen, 2014), esp. 11–52; Nikolas Broy, “Bourdieu, Weber und Rational Choice: Versuch einer Weiterentwicklung des religiösen Feldmodells am Beispiel Chinas,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*

and its recent adaptations appear of particular interest for the current debate on new forms of long-term history, and for the typical interdisciplinary engagement between different subfields of the study of religion. At the very least, it can help historical scholars to start a conversation.

While the theoretical framework itself demands a minimum amount of engagement and familiarization with key concepts, as does any sociological work with a Bourdieusian pedigree, the concept of the religious field is based on a handful of powerful explanatory metaphors and has been made accessible by various overviews and critiques.⁷ Recent adaptations have already collected and addressed criticisms made of Bourdieu's original model, which was first conceived early in his career, in 1971,⁸ and have suggested significant changes, which are often highly congenial to historical adaptation.⁹ Some typical terms and approaches are already being adopted more widely—several interdisciplinary approaches have for example appropriated the term “religious field” in a generalized sense, as a term evoking the openness and plurality of religion.¹⁰

25 (2017), 287–324. An interesting recent adaptation for historical work is Klaus Große Kracht, “Das ‚katholische Feld‘. Perspektiven auf den Katholizismus des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts im Anschluss an Pierre Bourdieu,” in *Katholizismus transnational. Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte und Gegenwart in Westeuropa und den Vereinigten Staaten*, ed. Andreas Henkelmann et al. (Münster, 2019), 53–72.

- 7 Besides the literature in n. 6, cf. Terry Rey, “Marketing the Goods of Salvation: Bourdieu on Religion,” *Religion* 34 (2004), 331–343; Bryan S. Turner, “Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Religion,” in *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays, Key Issues in Modern Sociology*, ed. Simon Susen and Bryan S. Turner (London, 2011), 223–245; David Swartz, “Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion. Pierre Bourdieu's Political Economy of Symbolic Power,” *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996), 71–58.
- 8 Pierre Bourdieu, “Genèse et structure du champ religieux,” *Revue française de sociologie* 12 (1971), 295–334. This article cites the English translation Pierre Bourdieu, “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field,” *Comparative Social Research. A Research Annual* 13 (1991), 1–44, but it should be noted that this translation is not always particularly clear and congenial. A useful collection of Bourdieusian texts on religion is contained in the anthology Pierre Bourdieu, *Das religiöse Feld. Texte zur Ökonomie des Heilsgeschehens*, ed. Stephan Egger, Andreas Pfeuffer, Franz Schultheis [édition discours], Konstanz 2000.
- 9 See esp. the overviews of criticisms by Rey, *Bourdieu* (see above, n. 6), 120–133; Broy, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), 291–292.
- 10 See below at n. 131 and e.g. Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden, 2012), 15–70; Thoralf Klein and Christian Meyer, “Beyond the Market: Exploring the Religious Field in Modern China,” *Religion* 41 (2011), 529–534.

The present article therefore sets itself the task of discussing Bourdieu's theory of the religious field and relevant recent re-workings for an audience interested in the cultural history of religion, particularly in the history of pre-modern Europe. The discussion will be highly compressed and pragmatic and aims explicitly to gauge and illustrate the model's usability for interdisciplinary scholarship of a historical nature. While I will attempt to look beyond the confines of my own professional specialization, the point of view is necessarily that of a historian particularly familiar with high and late medieval Latin Christianity. Examples will primarily be taken from the central topic of this thematic section, the religious field during the long fifteenth century and its aftermath up to c. 1600. But this focus should not obscure the fact that thinking about the religious field is an excellent framework for linking and comparing different periods, and that its frame is also scaleable from the local to the global.¹¹ While the discussion here cannot offer any in-depth exegesis of Bourdieu's work, on the other hand, it will specifically criticize Bourdieu's historical grounding of his theory in medieval and early modern history and his resulting emphasis on (Catholic) Christianity. His original contribution by now needs both a theoretical update and a stringent revision of its outdated view of the medieval and early modern church.

The article will proceed by discussing several thematic aspects. A first engagement with Bourdieu will focus on the concept of "field" and argue that this approach is highly productive for a historicization of religion (2). After a brief critical discussion of Bourdieu's description of the internal dynamics of the religious field (3), the article makes suggestions for revisions and adaptations (4). A more forward-looking, pragmatic section then suggests how historians could also trace several dynamics between fields or could investigate the additional dynamics of size, location, and diversity of the religious field (5). The article closes with a summary of the potential usefulness of the approach and remaining open questions (6).

11 See e.g. Broy, "Bourdieu" (see above, n. 6); Enzo Pace, Alberto da Silva Moreira, "Introduction. Religious Diversity in a Global Religious Field," *Religion* 9 (2018), 95–100; Lene van der Aa Kühle, "Globalization, Bourdieu and New Religions," in *New Religions and Globalization: Empirical, Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*, ed. Armin W. Geertz and Margit Warburg (Aarhus, 2008), 95–108.

2 The Field Model and its Application to Pre-Modern European Religion

2.1 *The Religious Field as an Arena of "Religious Labour"*

Bourdieu's 1971 article "Génèse et structure du champ religieux" constitutes an important point for his development of a theory of social fields, his version of an overall theory of society.¹² Bourdieu's principal engagement was with Max Weber's view of religion, and thus with Weber's view of the emergence of a differentiated modern society. Weber had discussed the emergence of modern society as a gradual development of distinct social value spheres (family, religion, wealth, political community, scientific truth, art and erotic love),¹³ which brought about a development and refinement of different "rationalities" within the increasingly distinct spheres.¹⁴ Bourdieu ran with the central assumption of specialization inherent in this theory, and tied his idea of social fields closely to the underlying idea of the societal division of labour. Because of this orientation, the model of the religious field can be understood as a theory of differentiation, i.e. a theory which describes "religion" as something that is distinct from other fields or spheres, defined historically by the fact that it is not law, not politics, not economy, but rather a distinct area with its own distinct logics.¹⁵

12 On the status of the religious field in Bourdieu's work, see e.g. Erwan Dianteill, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Religion: A Central and Peripheral Concern," *Theory and Society* 32 (2003), 529–549; Stephan Egger, Andreas Pfeuffer, Franz Schultheis, "Vom Habitus zum Feld. Religion, Soziologie und die Spuren Max Webers bei Pierre Bourdieu," in Bourdieu, *Das religiöse Feld* (see above, n. 8), 131–176. For Bourdieu on fields, see Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, "The Logic of Fields," in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Chicago, 1992), 94–115; a later overview is Pierre Bourdieu, *Cours de sociologie générale. Cours au Collège de France, 1981–1984 and 1983–1986*, 2 vols. (Paris 2015–2016), 1:541–545.

13 Gorski, "Bourdieuian Theory" (see above, n. 6), at 334.

14 The topic of Weberian "rationalities" in history has been explored by David L. D'Avray, *Medieval Religious Rationalities. A Weberian Analysis* (Cambridge, 2010); idem, *Rationalities in History. A Weberian Essay in Comparison* (Cambridge, 2010).

15 Differentiation theory has been a particular interest of recent German sociology, especially systems theoretical schools, see the overview by Uwe Schimank, *Theorien gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung* (Wiesbaden, 2007) and with an actor-oriented slant particularly interesting for historians idem, "Gesellschaftliche Differenzierungsdynamiken—ein Fünf-Fronten-Kampf," in *Soziale Differenzierung. Handlungstheoretische Zugänge in der Diskussion*, ed. Thomas Schwinn, Clemens Kroneberg, Jens Greve, (Wiesbaden, 2011), 261–284. For an illuminating comparative discussion of the concept of differentiation in field theoretical and systems theoretical perspectives, see Georg Kneer, "Differenzierung bei

Adding a stronger Marxist inspiration, however, Bourdieu conceptualized the activities done in different social arenas as “labour” in a much more direct and concrete way than Weber, as an activity done to gain (and done by expending and “investing”) particular forms of “capital,” i.e. resources specific to each field. While material capital was the currency and goal of the economic field, actors on the religious field produced and distributed religious capital or resources.¹⁶

As Bourdieu’s theorizing was rooted in Weber’s essentially historical model of society, his view of the development of different social fields is also historical—and not, as several other sociological models, a simple typology of “traditional” versus “modern” society. Bourdieu actually has a surprisingly dynamic and open view of the historical relation between different social fields. He never formulated an explicit, fully elaborated model of stages or trajectories of all social fields, insisting on the complexity of social evolution.¹⁷ Bourdieu thus largely avoided the trap of offering a fixed (and therefore easily outdated) system of historical stages—at least in his theorizing.¹⁸ But he of course remained visibly indebted to traditional historical periodizations in his discussion of the religious field, making distinct reference to Antiquity, the medieval period, the Reformation and so on. Yet he generally assumed that social fields could emerge, disappear again, and become entangled with each other over time. More importantly, Bourdieu emphasized that the religious field could affect and be affected by other fields, an assumption that Weber had classically formulated in his “Protestant Ethic.”¹⁹ In contrast to secularization theories, which have been criticized for this issue among others,²⁰ Bourdieu thus does

Bourdieu und Luhmann. Ein Theorienvergleich,” in *Bourdieu und Luhmann. Ein Theorienvergleich*, ed. Armin Nassehi and Gerd Nollmann (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 25–56.

16 On Bourdieu’s notion of capital, see e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York, 1986), 241–258 and e.g. Rey, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), 50–53. Instead of “capital,” I frequently use the term “resources,” which is more familiar to historians and has recently been operationalized for historical work, e.g. in Anke K. Scholz et al. (eds.), *ResourceCultures: Sociocultural Dynamics and the Use of Resources: Theories, Methods, Perspectives* [Ressourcenkulturen 5] (Tübingen, 2017).

17 See Swartz, “Metaprinciples” (see above, n. 6), 19–20; 30; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant, “The Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 109.

18 See the appraisal in Sita Steckel, “Differenzierung jenseits der Moderne. Eine Debatte zu mittelalterlicher Religion und moderner Differenzierungstheorie,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 47 (2013), 307–351, esp. 340–349.

19 See e.g. William H. Swatos Jr. and Lutz Kaelber (eds.), *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis*, 2nd ed. (Herndon, 2016).

20 On the problems of secularization theory, see recently Ian Hunter, “Secularization. The

not assume that the influence of the religious field on other fields is steadily diminishing throughout history—though he of course accepted and discussed specific processes of secularization, for example in his observations on the “dissolution of the religious field” during the twentieth century.²¹

2.2 Social Fields as “Arenas of Struggle” and “Serious Game”

Importantly, Bourdieu’s model of the religious field differs from other theories of differentiation in its focus on conflict, and therefore on complex forms of transformation. Rather than solely emphasizing specialization, Bourdieu’s concept of fields assumes that competition for resources is a factor of change, as various resources (material or immaterial) are perceived as scarce commodities, and become embattled. In this sense, a “social field” is not simply an area of social life but an “arena of struggle.”²² Speaking about a “field” implies the conscious mapping of relations between different actors who are engaged in this struggle, and thus in constant motion. Some actors on the field will be in a dominant position, others in a subordinated or marginalized place or in a well-defined niche.

The link between power relations and field positions in Bourdieu’s model of the religious field is not deterministic—an issue that is best conveyed through his metaphors of “serious game” and *illusio*.²³ Historical actors on the structured “playing field” of religion have specific positions and may find themselves in a position of power or a weakened and marginal position to begin with.²⁴ But positions are not determined completely by social context, class, etc., but are consciously or unconsciously taken up (“prise de position”). The game and its rules become embodied through the socialization of the actors and their development of *habitus*, and thus shape their reality, a process Bourdieu ingeniously describes as *il-lusio*.²⁵ To improve or stabilize their position, the actors will then

Birth of a Modern Combat Concept,” *Modern Intellectual History* 12 (2015), 1–32; Manuel Borutta, “Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie. Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 36,3 (2010), 347–376.

21 Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, “La dissolution du religieux,” in Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris, 1987), 117–123; this view has been developed by Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6), 43–58.

22 Swartz, “Metaprinciples” (see above, n. 6), 26–27.

23 Cf. Swartz, “Metaprinciples” (see above, n. 6), 31–33.

24 Bourdieu and Wacquant, “Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 97. On the dynamic of structures and individual action in Bourdieu’s work, see recently Astrid Reuter, “Praxeologie: Struktur und Handeln (Pierre Bourdieu),” in *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, ed. Detlef Pollack et al., (Wiesbaden, 2018), 171–202.

25 Cf. Bourdieu, *Sociologie générale* (see above, n. 12), 1: 314–319; Rey, *Bourdieu* (see above, n. 6) 84–94.

use various resources to reposition themselves, including resources from other fields, for example by using political or economic power to enhance their religious status or vice versa.

Bourdieu and Louis Wacquant define a “field” against this background, using specific abstract terms. It is “a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions.”²⁶ This emphasizes that taking a field perspective means thinking relationally, thinking about power, and thinking about the tensions between interaction and social structure. Though it can be very tempting to use the handy phrase “the religious field” as a container term denoting the sum of religious groups, institutions, or dynamics, this flattens Bourdieu’s own conceptualization. As David Swartz warns, “fields are analytic constructs, not simple reflections of social reality.”²⁷

In contrast to theories of the “religious market,” which for the most part view (modern) religious decisions as driven by conscious rational choice, Bourdieu’s theoretical view thus introduces more constraints on individual interaction, which makes it easier to historicize forms of religious decision-making.²⁸ According to Bourdieu, religious choices are not made according to one uniform type of strategy or calculation, but rather according to the different “rules of the game” and capitals brought into play on the relevant social fields and sub-fields—so that the development of religious preferences among medieval nobles might, for example, be a result of individual religious preferences, but perhaps also strongly tied to the social logic of their dynasties or other considerations.²⁹ Bourdieu’s views on the embodiment of field positions by way of *habitus* also implies that choices—even “rational” choices—are at least partially unconscious or routinized.

26 Bourdieu and Wacquant, “Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 97.

27 Swartz, “Metaprinciples” (see above, n. 6), 27.

28 For models of the religious market, and their extensive discussion of rational choice (which I cannot discuss here), see e.g. Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford, 1999); Fenggang Yang, “The Red, Black and Gray Markets of Religion in China,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006), 93–122; for forms of religious decision-making see Sita Steckel, “Problematische Prozesse. Die mittelalterliche Inquisition als Fallbeispiel der Problematisierung religiösen Entscheidens im Mittelalter,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 52 (2018), 356–399 and the forthcoming volume Matthias Pohlig and Sita Steckel (eds.), *Über Religion entscheiden. Religiöse Optionen und Alternativen im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Christentum—Choosing My Religion. Religious Options and Alternatives in Medieval and Early Modern Christianity* (forthcoming in 2020).

29 See e.g. Emilia Jamrozak, *Survival and Success on Medieval Borders: Cistercian Houses in Medieval Scotland and Pomerania from the Twelfth to the Late Fourteenth Century* [Medieval texts and cultures of Northern Europe 24] (Turnhout, 2011).

2.3 *The Religious Field as “Playing Field” and “Force Field”*

This prompts questions about Bourdieu's views on changes within the field and the tension between individual interaction and social structures. Importantly, Bourdieu argues that the positions taken by actors on the religious field always introduce asymmetries of knowledge as well as power, and thus “naturalize” power asymmetries at the same time. To him, one of most important functionalities of religion is not only to “naturalize” religious beliefs, but also to “naturalize” the social power differentials which develop in historical societies, and thus to “consecrate” forms of social, ritual, or epistemological inequality.³⁰ Bourdieu thus gives religion a strongly ideological function in legitimizing inequality, and as several critics have pointed out, tends to reduce it to a tool of the powerful.³¹ Yet Bourdieu himself accommodates the possibility that religious argumentations may delegitimize established authority, especially by arguing that actors can also attempt to change the nature of the “game” by redefining its playing rules and the boundaries of the playing field.

To describe this dynamic, the metaphor of “game” and “playing field” needs to be complemented with a second one, that of the “force field.” The metaphor of the “playing field” emphasizes the actors' initiative both on the field and in defining and transforming the field. As Philip Gorski underlines, “the metaphor of the playing field suggests the role of subjective perceptions and strategic action in the dynamic of fields, and more generally, of the structuring effects of human action, of the ways in which actors and actions are phenomenologically prior to and constitutive of fields.”³² But this emphasis on dynamism and cultural negotiation is counterbalanced by the metaphor of the “force field,” which insists on the force of pre-existing structural configurations: “The metaphor of the force field evokes the objective character and structuring effects of the social field, the ways in which fields are external to actors and prior to actions. Just as a magnetic field causes iron filings to arrange themselves into particular patterns, Bourdieu suggests, so social fields cause individual actors to arrange themselves into structured relations [...].”³³

Combining both aspects, that of the historical actor's agency in defining their own game and that of a pre-existing power structure acting as a force field, imposing constraints on them, yields a nuanced model of religious change as

30 Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 13–16, 31–33.

31 Cf. Rey, *Bourdieu* (see above, n. 6), 121–126; Broy, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), 291–292.

32 Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory” (see above, n. 6), 328; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant, “The Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 118.

33 Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory” (see above, n. 6), 328.

cultural production or reproduction (well familiar to cultural historians): The idea of a pre-existing field in which actors seek to gain resources and advantaged positions implies constant activity and change as a normal condition, as all actors participate in struggles to gain resources, predominantly by attempting to reproduce the “consecrated” positions structuring the field, thus producing cultural iterations, but also (as a matter of course) small variations. Yet Bourdieu also draws attention to innovations generated by the “game”: While some players may simply aim to maximize their advantages by getting the most out of the rules, reproducing the same game, other players may try to change the rules to succeed, and thus trigger a restructuring of the positions on the field. In Bourdieu’s terminology, which will be retained here, this would lead to a “reconfiguration” of the field.

Illustrating religion’s function of legitimizing or “naturalizing” power and inequality, Bourdieu discusses late medieval reform movements and the Protestant Reformation as one example of such a “reconfiguration”:³⁴ The far-reaching attacks on certain aspects of sacramental power and adjacent political and economic privileges of the clergy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries eventually successfully “denaturalized” them. As Bourdieu himself argued, however, such denaturalization processes would then be followed by a renewed process of stabilization, re-consecrating the new power positions once a reconfigured religious field had stabilized.

2.4 *Historical Adaptation: Charting the Boundaries of the Religious Field*

With an eye to historical studies, using some of these field-theoretical metaphors helps address the criticism—principally formulated in Religious Studies—that using the term “religion” for historical phenomena projects modern concepts of religion back into the past.³⁵ Not least, this criticism concerns the fact that “religion” is a particularly Western term, which may not be appropriate in all contexts and has inherited certain asymmetries.³⁶

From a historical point of view, this problem is well known. It has for example been pointed out that the historian should not take the role of inquisitor, dividing “true” from “false” historical religion.³⁷ Yet investigate and “map”

34 Cf. Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 26–28.

35 See recently e.g. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT, 2015).

36 See e.g. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2008).

37 See John H. Arnold, “The Historian as Inquisitor. On the Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern

the various historical contestations we must, and for that it may be helpful to understand religion as a strongly negotiated discourse—as Astrid Reuter helpfully puts it, an “essentially contested concept.”³⁸ Rather than attempting to define religion for their specific historical fields of study, historians may therefore find it helpful to frame their study of religion as a process of tracing or “mapping” the various dynamics of the religious field, especially its negotiated boundaries, in a perspective Reuter calls “charting the boundaries of the religious field.”³⁹

As Bourdieu himself emphasizes, any definition of fields is tricky, as the criteria for inclusion and exclusion are both fluid and defined from within the field. It is indeed part and parcel of the ongoing “serious game” to define both the rules and the boundaries of a field.⁴⁰ For this reason, an opponent’s position is frequently attacked by questioning whether he is really within the game/field and relevant for it, in an attempt to deny the “force field” effects. As Bourdieu for example points out, a sociologist may be disparaged and excluded from discussion by saying that “he’s no *real* sociologist.”

As anyone interested in the construction of religious difference knows, this strategy is also highly typical on historical versions of the religious field: religious competitors were often disparaged by calling their religion “no *real* religion,” but merely a bundle of superstitions or heresy.⁴¹ Operations of this type in fact produced the important terminologies underlying the modern notion of religion across the centuries, such as *religio* vs. *superstitio* or *vera fides* vs. *haeresis*. Yet these attempts to exclude a competitor conceptually from the religious field still clearly proceed from the fact that the competitor’s position had “field” effects on their detractor—contrary to some modern assumptions, which interpret disparagements of religious competitors to mean that the historical actors in question understood only their own beliefs and rites as the “true faith” and could not understand or describe other religions as compara-

Voices,” *Rethinking History* 2 (1998), 379–386; see also the important remarks of Christine Caldwell Ames, “Does Inquisition Belong to Religious History?” *The American Historical Review* 110 (2005), 11–37; ead., “Medieval Religious” (see above, n. 2).

38 Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6), 22, referencing Walter B. Gallie.

39 Besides Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6), 53–58 see the brief discussion Reuter, “Charting the Boundaries” (see above, n. 6).

40 Bourdieu and Wacquant, “Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 100.

41 See e.g. Jan G. Platvoet, “Contexts, Concepts & Contests: Towards a Pragmatics of Defining Religion,” in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests*, ed. Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk [Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions 84] (Leiden, 1999), 463–516.

ble to it.⁴² While pre-modern religious actors were indeed quick to disparage religious “others,” and to exclude them from the religious field with the help of specific semantic and categorical boundaries, refutations typically show that the threat of comparability and competition was imminent in the situation: If divergent practices and beliefs had not been recognized as competition, they could have been ignored.⁴³

The central metaphors of Bourdieu’s theory thus highlight the complexities we face when analysing religion as a socially negotiated concept with a long and multi-linear history. Historically oriented scholars not only impose their own concept of “religion” on the past (as historians generally do with concepts, one may remark in passing); many also analyse previous iterations of such impositions, in which historical actors in turn analysed and defined concepts they named “faith,” “law,” “religion,” “heresy,” “cult,” “superstition” and so on.⁴⁴ Bourdieu’s view of the religious field as a space of negotiation—especially a space of negotiation of inclusion/exclusion—supports this historical (or as one might say, “genealogical”⁴⁵) understanding of religion. Referring to the “religious field” rather than to “religion” in relevant contexts of historical enquiry might thus be of practical help to convey historians’ awareness of the historically varied and contested nature of the concept and its adjacent terminologies.

Engaging with Bourdieu’s metaphor of the religious field as a “force field,” where some things have an “objective” attraction to each other and some do not, can also be taken as a reminder to acknowledge contemporary labelling in its varying degrees of institutionalization, and to be wary of the fuzziness inherent in religious categorizations in our sources, which may obscure ambivalence and miscommunications.⁴⁶ Given prior knowledge which had already been

42 Thus e.g. Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); Nongbri, *Before Religion* (see above, n. 35).

43 On comparison as an indicator of relation and hierarchy, see the discussion in Christina Brauner and Sita Steckel, “Wie die Heiden—wie die Papisten. Religiöse Polemik und Vergleiche vom Hochmittelalter bis zur Konfessionalisierung,” in *Juden, Christen und Muslime im Zeitalter der Reformation*, ed. Matthias Pohligh [Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 219], (forthcoming, Gütersloh, 2020), 41–91.

44 See the important overview and conceptualization by Dorothea Weltecke, “Über Religion vor der ‘Religion’. Konzeptionen vor der Entstehung des neuzeitlichen Begriffs,” in *Religion als Prozess: Kulturwissenschaftliche Wege der Religionsforschung*, ed. Thomas G. Kirsch, Rudolf Schlögl, and Dorothea Weltecke (Paderborn, 2015), 13–34.

45 Cf. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

46 See e.g. Gerard Wiegers, “Fuzzy Categories and Religious Polemics. The Daily Life of Christians and Muslims in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean World,” *Common Knowledge* 19 (2013), 474–489.

“naturalized” or canonized, a medieval Christian inquisitor investigating heresy might for example be convinced that certain dietary practices like vegetarianism were based on heretical ideology, and therefore ascribe them relevance in a heresy trial. Such a labelling might occur quite independently of the suspects’ understanding of this practice. In contrast, an early modern Jesuit missionary encountering particular Asian religions might not have a canonized knowledge of dietary practices to fall back on, and would thus have to negotiate about this question.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the metaphor of “boundary work on the religious field” can also be applied to other forms of the negotiation of religion and the sacred by historical actors, and this creates links to and between the many different research approaches which have dealt with constructions of the sacred and its spatial and material realizations in the European past.⁴⁷ It is not only possible to map persons being excluded from the field, for example, but also to study the desacralization or sacralization of practices and norms, spatial arrangements and other phenomena. The practice of selling indulgences could for example be attacked by asserting that it had no religious merit, but represented an economic practice designed to make a profit (and was thus “no *real* religion”). On a material and spatial plane, laypeople or clerics might be admitted to a monastery, but perhaps only to a certain transitory space—or be allowed entry only under certain conditions which upheld boundaries, such as donning monastic garb. This demarcated boundaries which divided and thus constituted profane, partially sacred and “most sacred” spaces.

This also leads to a highly important caution, concerning how we link any construction of a historical “religious field” to historical spaces. On a theoretical plane, Bourdieu argued that any field is defined from within, which would suggest that its realization in space—its particular historical configuration—is also defined from within and historically variable. Most adapted theories of the religious field have suggested that the scaling and spatialization of the field taken under observation is up to the observer (exactly as is the case with “culture”). We can thus assume local, regional, and even global religious fields—

47 From among many different approaches, see e.g. Anne E. Lester, “Translation and Appropriation: Greek Relics in the Latin West in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade,” *Studies in Church history* 53 (2017), 88–117; Wolfram Drews, Almut Höfert, and Jörg Gengnagel (eds.), “Sakralität und Sakralisierung in transkultureller Perspektive,” in *Monarchische Herrschaftsformen der Vormoderne in transkultureller Perspektive*, ed. Wolfram Drews [Europa im Mittelalter 26] (Berlin, 2015), 175–238; Saebjorg Walaker Nordeide, Stefan Brink (eds.), *Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape Through Space and Time* [Studies in the early Middle Ages 11] (Turnhout, 2013).

though it has already been observed that the latter only appear to be emerging during the modern period, so that local and regional religious fields would appear as the default setting for pre-modern Europe.⁴⁸ Making historical generalizations, historians may thus speak about specific fields. But talking about a historically realized field (e.g. the religious field of western Europe during the high medieval centuries, as distinct from the configurations of the eastern and western Mediterranean area at the same time) implies that the regional field under discussion is shaped by roughly comparable configurations. This sort of historical generalization seems permissible—and even run-of-the mill, given the way we tend to speak e.g. about “European culture”—but it abstracts differences which would become visible in a study of local configurations. This means that we must pay considerable attention to the extent of fields we postulate. Speaking of a “European” religious field, particularly during the medieval period, seems problematic insofar as many European regions were inextricably entwined with the Mediterranean continuum, and there were significant differences in the configuration of the religious field between (say) England, Italy, Iberia, Scandinavia, or south-eastern Europe.

As in the historical study of culture, which generally postulates culture as processual and fluid rather than as cultural “containers,” we should thus be wary of similar misconstructions of the religious field.⁴⁹ It appears highly problematic to postulate a “religious field of Christianity,” or a “religious field of the Latin church,” for example—a trap Bourdieu himself falls into. This issue must therefore be discussed, together with some other problematic aspects of his work.

3 With Bourdieu against Bourdieu: Updating the View of Historical Dynamics within the Religious Field

3.1 *Bourdieu's View of the Religious Field and the Church*

Imagining pre-modern religion as a crowded playing field peopled by actors in specific positions of power seems helpful for a multi-perspectival study of religious identities. Yet from the point of view of a historian of pre-modern Christianity, Bourdieu's religious field appears rooted in a rather outdated version of

48 See e.g. Van der Aa Kühle, “Globalization” (see above, n. 11); Krech, “Dynamics” (see above, n. 10).

49 On this discussion for “culture,” see e.g. Andreas Reckwitz, “Multikulturalismustheorien und der Kulturbegriff. Vom Homogenitätsmodell zum Modell kultureller Interferenzen,” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 11 (2001), 179–200.

medieval and early modern Christianity. While Bourdieu mentions Islam and other non-Christian religions, he tends to focus strongly on the Latin Christian tradition (tellingly, named simply “the Church”). In spite of attempts to nuance, he also portrays the medieval Latin church as a rigid hierocracy wielding an almost absolute monopoly over the worldview and practice of believers. This overemphasis of ecclesiastical power is the most problematic aspect of his 1971 essay on the religious field, which deals primarily with the dynamics *within* the religious field.⁵⁰

Bourdieu’s discussion of these internal dynamics of the religious field is closely focused on Weber’s typology of religious actors, and thus primarily deals with the study of two dimensions or relationships within the field. The first dimension, the “hierarchy” of the field, concerns the relationships between religious “specialists” and “laypeople.” A second dimension Bourdieu calls “orthodoxy” concerns the dynamics between “specialists,” conceptualized by Bourdieu along the Weberian trias of established “priests,” unestablished, charismatic “prophets,” and transaction-oriented “sorcerers,” all working in competition to offer their teachings and services to the laypeople.⁵¹

But Bourdieu sets his own accents. Discussing specialists and laypeople, he adds a trenchant analysis of the power relationships established by and with the genesis of the religious field, pointing out how the professionalization of religious labour caused the birth of “laypeople” as a categorically distinct and dependent class. While this insistence on power asymmetry is an important point, he describes the laypeople as largely “dispossessed” of religious resources and even “pauperized”—though he theoretically admits, at the same time, the possibility of lay religious production and, at the very end of a spectrum describing the hierarchy of the field, religious “self-sufficiency.”⁵² As several scholars engaging with Bourdieu’s works have pointed out, this passivity of the laypeople is one of the most important weaknesses of his model.⁵³ Nikolas Broy has recently even suggested that we might replace the Weberian typology with completely different typologies of specialists and non-specialists, and offers one such typology for the religious field of modern China, which divides laypeople into “adherents,” “clients,” and “observers.”⁵⁴

Scrutinizing Bourdieu’s footnotes leads to the suspicion that his problematic view of laypeople is largely explainable by a combination of ahistorical

50 This article cannot engage with Bourdieu’s views of the modern church.

51 Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 24–31.

52 Ibid., 9–10.

53 See Rey, *Bourdieu* (see above, n. 6), 120–126.

54 Broy, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), 308–310.

or outdated views of the history of Christianity. Bourdieu thus assumes that the medieval Latin church held a near total religious “monopoly” over the laity, writing for example (my emphases):⁵⁵ “The concentration of religious capital was never more complete than in Medieval Europe. The Church, organized according to a complex hierarchy, utilized a language almost unknown to the people and *held a monopoly* over access to the tools of worship, sacred texts, and, above all, sacraments.”⁵⁶ In another passage, Bourdieu asserts that “priestly systematization holds the laity at a distance [...] and convinces them that this activity requires a special ‘qualification’, a ‘gift of grace’, *inaccessible to the common people*. It persuades them to abandon the administration of their religious affairs to the ruling class [...]”⁵⁷ Though he also attempts to nuance this view, Bourdieu concludes from this overall picture that during the European Middle Ages, “the religious field is co-extensive with the field of relations of competition at the very heart of the church.”⁵⁸

There are several problems with this view besides the conceptualization of the laypeople. Bourdieu’s understanding of the medieval laity seems not only significantly indebted to a modern, secularist form of anticlericalism, and to a view of society which generally postulates a conflict between elite and masses (which is particularly common in French historiography, and has been dubbed the “Republican paradigm”⁵⁹). Moreover, Bourdieu seems indebted to particular scholarship, such as the Catholic scholar Etienne Delaruelle, noted for his laudable but somewhat undifferentiated insistence on a “popular” religious culture of the medieval centuries, which he described during the 1960s as characterized by affectivity, naïveté, and primitivism, and thus as opposed to the elaborate theological teachings developed by the ecclesiastical elites.⁶⁰

55 Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 26; see also below.

56 Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 26 (my emphasis).

57 Ibid., 31 (my emphasis).

58 Ibid., 26. For nuancing, see e.g. *ibid.* 18–19.

59 Cf. Sabrina Corbellini, Mart van Duijn, Suzan Folkerts, Margriet Hoogvliet, “Challenging the Paradigms: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Late Medieval Europe,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 93.2 (2013), 171–188, there 179–180; Margriet Hoogvliet, “Questioning the ‘Republican Paradigm’: Scripture-Based Reform in France before the Reformation,” in *Vernacular Bible and Religious Reform in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era*, ed. Wim François, August den Hollander [Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 287] (Leuven, 2017), 75–106.

60 Cf. Bourdieu’s citation of Delaruelle in Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 26 with n. 48. On Delaruelle, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, “A propos de Etienne Delaruelle, La piété populaire au Moyen Age, avant-propos de Ph. Wolff, introduction par R. Manselli et André Vauchez,” *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 31.5 (1976), 941–953.

This dichotomy, which opposes “learned” clerical dogma with popular, folkloric beliefs and practices, has been extensively re-evaluated today.⁶¹ We know much more about the education and the many religious initiatives of medieval laypeople (who were partly of high status, and patrons rather than clients of the clergy). Several studies have also pointed to explicit medieval debates questioning the categorizations underlying the Christian lay-clerical divide.⁶² To accommodate scholarship engaging with non-Christian religions, it also seems important to take constellations without a strong clergy-laity divide into account. As Broy and others suggest, for example, situations of religious plurality typically result in a much more market-like dynamic, such as an “oligopoly,” and yield substantially more transaction-oriented interactions on the religious field.⁶³

Bourdieu's focus on a monopolistic and monolithic medieval church furthermore also affects his conceptualization of religious change. This shows itself most clearly in his discussion of the competition between different types of religious “specialists”—that is, the second principal dynamic and dimension of the religious field, which he (tellingly) labels the “orthodoxy” of the field. Even though there are, again, important differentiations and asides nuancing his strong hypotheses, Bourdieu has a tendency to reduce the interplay between religious specialists to a battle between an established caste of “priests” holding a full monopoly and various charismatic “prophets” attempting to undermine it.⁶⁴ His discussion of Christian reform movements as illustrative of this trend contributes to an overall picture of a European religious field that is largely unchanged over centuries: There is a powerful, monolithic medieval church that is almost static, albeit increasingly attacked by heretics; one has the impression that after the brief upheaval of the Reformations, the positions of power are re-consecrated, and the equally powerful Catholic church of the Ancien Régime emerges, if no longer in a position of complete monopoly.

61 See e.g. Klaus Schreiner, “Laienfrömmigkeit—Frömmigkeit von Eliten oder Frömmigkeit des Volkes? Zur sozialen Verfaßtheit laikaler Frömmigkeitspraxis im späten Mittelalter,” in *Laienfrömmigkeit im Späten Mittelalter. Formen, Funktionen, politisch-soziale Zusammenhänge*, ed. by Klaus Schreiner (München, 1992), 1–78; Bert Roest, Janneke Uphoff (eds.), *Religious Orders and Religious Identity Formation, ca. 1420–1620. Discourses and Strategies of Observance and Pastoral Engagement* [The medieval Franciscans 13] (Leiden, 2016).

62 See e.g. the contribution by Ian Johnson below, in this section.

63 Broy, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), esp 296–300.

64 See e.g. Bourdieu, “Genesis” (see above, n. 8), 26: “A particular form of struggle for monopoly is seen when the church holds a total monopoly over the instruments of salvation. This opposition between orthodoxy and heresy (homologous to the opposition between the church and the prophet) unfolds according to an almost invariant process [...]”

But of course, this is a very unrealistic picture of the many big and small transformations of pre-modern Christianity, and Bourdieu's reduction of the competition between specialists to patterns of heresy and the Reformation again constitutes a projection of modern ideology. Importantly, the idea of the powerful medieval papal church figures prominently in the work of modern Protestant authors like Ernst Troeltsch, who elaborated on Weber's notion (and formulation) that religious specialists battled over a "monopoly." In wording that ultimately appears addressed to contemporary Neo-Thomistic tendencies within Catholicism, Troeltsch spoke of the creation of a "unified Christian culture" within the high medieval church—a notion which Weber expressly questioned.⁶⁵ While Troeltsch abstracted from the high medieval church largely to develop his model of opposing ideal types of "churches" and "sects"—a discussion that is quite nuanced and interesting⁶⁶—the nuances of this debate were, unhappily, largely lost in Bourdieu's reformulation. He thus conflates the ideal types of "embattled monopoly" and a "unified church" to create the impression of a monolithic medieval church actually holding a successful monopoly.

Differentiating this view demands precision. The criticism does not primarily concern the fact of the existence of a powerful hierocracy within the medieval Latin church. The political body led by the high and late medieval papacy was, quite incontrovertibly, a supra-national hegemonial power which wielded significant ideological, social, political, and economic resources to enforce its universalist claims (at least between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries). Often enough, it not only threatened but used physical violence, or even military action, to exclude, denigrate, discipline, and exterminate its opponents. Nevertheless, labelling this hegemonic position of the Latin church in most of Latin Europe as a religious "monopoly" causes severe problems.

Firstly and generally, it invites non-specialists to confuse the level of ideology with that of lived reality on one hand, and with historical analysis on the other. The Roman church of the Middle Ages indeed had strongly universalist claims and considered itself as the holder of a monopoly where the access to salvation was concerned. For a historical view purporting to evaluate this sort

65 Cf. Christoph Auffarth, "Das Ende der Katharer im Konzept einer Europäischen Religionsgeschichte," in: *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs. Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Brigitte Luchesi & Kocku von Stuckrad [Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 52], (Berlin/New York, 2004), 291–306, at 295; generally Ulrich Köpf, "Die Idee der 'Einheitskultur' des Mittelalters," in *Ernst Troeltschs Soziallehren: Studien zu ihrer Interpretation*, ed. Trutz Rendtorff and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf [Troeltsch-Studien 6] (Gütersloh, 1993), 103–121.

66 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 1 (1912, trans. Louisville, 1992).

of ideology in its historical context, however, it seems unwise to assent to this claim from the outset. While there can be no question that the Latin church exerted considerable power, for example over the many European Jews and dissenters it labelled as “heretics,” there can also be no doubt that Jews and heretics nevertheless existed, and explicitly denied the Latin church’s ideology and universalist claims. Minimizing these dynamics only serves to cement an outdated teleology which views the medieval church as monolithic and all-powerful to be able to contrast it with the plurality of modernity, thus perpetuating a myth which is in good part modern, dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Secondly, reinforcing this stereotype also perpetuates an unspoken equation of “religion” with “Christianity,” and specifically Latin or even modern Catholic Christianity, obscuring the fact that Europe was, historically, always characterized by religious plurality, and that there was never a single Christian church. Though power differentials often meant that Christian authorities in lands with Christian hegemony held the decision over the life, death, or enforced conversion of Jewish, Muslim, or pagan inhabitants of cities and regions, any talk of a monopoly is, strictly speaking, a misrepresentation: As discussed above in relation to the spatial framing of the religious field, we might only be able to speak of a “monopoly” of specific Christian authorities if we remained focused on local constellations where absolutely no non-Christians influenced local society. But where would that be the case? Any larger scale of observation, even just a regional one, quickly runs into the necessity to accommodate the many in- and exclaves in which different religions lived together, as well as their “virtual” presence. As abundant studies have made clear by now, the various religious “others” of Christianity frequently played a significant role in defining the Christian “selves,” and therefore cannot be elided without obscuring dynamics of causality.⁶⁷ Many dynamics of the medieval and early modern religious landscape can, in fact, only be explained in reference to interplay and lived co-existence between different Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Pagan communities.⁶⁸

67 See e.g. the argument of Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2007), but also the observations in Cordelia Hess, Jonathan Adams (eds.), *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region* (New York, 2015); Heather Johnson, Hannah Blurton, “Virtual Jews and Figural Criticism: Recent Scholarship on the Idea of the Jew in Western Culture,” *Philological Quarterly* 92 (2013), 115–130.

68 For an example, one might think of the extensive religious polemics of the period linking “external” and “internal” enemies during the sixteenth century, see Brauner and Steckel, “Wie die Heiden” (see above, n. 43); examples from the Islamicate world e.g. in Camilla

Thirdly, uncontested claims for a “monopoly” of the Roman church obscure the fact that this “church” was in itself highly diverse, and—in spite of its increasingly centralized structure—hardly ever spoke in one voice, especially if one thinks about the level of everyday religious life rather than the papal curia. Continuing with the evocative myth of a “unified Christian culture” thus stands in opposition to the current urgent desideratum to develop a more comprehensive and integrated history of forms of religious plurality and diversity within Europe and the Mediterranean, such as situations of “oligopolies” in multi-religious constellations, or religious “black” and “grey markets” of illegitimate or semi-legitimate religious providers, as discussed in Religious Studies.⁶⁹ Within the Latin church, more attention needs to be paid to dynamics of competition between legitimate and illegitimate elites, including heterodox and dissenting voices, but also the many emerging legitimate religious “options” of the later Middle Ages,⁷⁰ for example the competing clerical, monastic, and mendicant pastors available to the laypeople (an issue to which I will return).

To genuinely adapt the model of the religious field for historical work, we would probably have to revise the typology of religious actors—both that of competing specialists, which are fairly diverse even within Latin Christianity across the medieval and early modern centuries, and the division into specialists and non-specialists. This provokes rather big questions—any attempt to create a new typology of “laypeople” within high and late medieval Europe alone would, for example, have to deal with a mass of historiography which has already dealt with this problem, but which is nevertheless divided into national, confessional, and disciplinary strands.⁷¹ But the alternative means that we remain saddled with an outdated model of religious history that will only cause our disciplines to lose relevance in the long run.

Altogether, three different suggestions for adaptations, complements and revisions can be taken up to arrive at a more balanced and adaptable ver-

Adang et al., eds., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfir* [Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts 123] (Leiden, 2016).

69 See the references above n. 28 and cf. the criticism discussed in Rey, *Bourdieu* (see above, n. 6), 126.

70 Cf. John van Engen, “Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church,” *Church History* 77 (2008) 257–284; Sabrina Corbellini, “Reconstructing Religious Places of Knowledge in Late Medieval Europe,” in *Über Religion entscheiden. Religiöse Optionen und Alternativen im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Christentum—Choosing my Religion. Religious Options and Alternatives in Medieval and Early Modern Christianity*, ed. Matthias Pohlig and Sita Steckel, (forthcoming 2020).

71 See the discussion in the introduction above, esp. 312–317.

sion of field theory for historians: We can pay closer attention to the dynamics between fields, we can complement Bourdieu's focus by observing additional dimensions and dynamics, and we can offer historical revisions of the internal dynamics (i.e. the dynamics between specialists and laypeople) that he envisaged.

4 Dynamics between Fields

4.1 *Resource Exchanges and Alliances*

One significant recent expansion of Bourdieu's work concerns the dynamics *between* different social fields.⁷² While Bourdieu's focus remains close to the interaction of the church with threatening "prophets," historical religious fields could of course be shaped and influenced by many different actors. In modernity, the state is one of the most important actors on the religious field. During the pre-modern centuries, it might be princes and governments who had a decisive influence, promoting particular religious stances or prohibiting adherence to a hitherto dominant church, thus undermining its status and forcing it out of a dominant position on the field. Legal experts might inadvertently find themselves as arbiters of religious privileges.⁷³ Booksellers intent on making a profit might play highly important roles in the spread of religious attitudes.⁷⁴

Focused on such forms of interplay, the idea of dynamics between social fields lends itself rather well to particular forms of historical inquiry. As has been discussed for various areas, the relationship between two different spheres of social life—such as religion and the economy, or modern science and politics—can be understood as a history of mutual relationships and resource exchanges, which can also be postulated between religion and other spheres or fields.⁷⁵ To a degree, this interrelation is built into the religious field:

72 Cf. Gorski, "Bourdieuian Theory" (see above, n. 6); Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6); Broy, "Bourdieu" (see above, n. 6), 291, 295–300.

73 This is the main thrust of Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6); for a medieval example, see e.g. Riccardo Parmeggiani, "Consiliatores dell'Inquisizione fiorentina al tempo di Dante: Cultura giuridico-letteraria nell'orbita di una oligarchia politico finanziaria," in *Il mondo errante. Dante fra letteratura, eresia e storia*, ed. Marco Veglia, Lorenzo Paolini, and Riccardo Parmeggiani (Spoleto, 2013), 57–80.

74 See e.g. Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York, 2016); W. Heijting, *Profijtelijke boekskens. Boekcultuur, geloof en gewin. Historische studies* (Hilversum, 2007).

75 See e.g. Mitchell G. Ash, "Wissenschaft(en) und Öffentlichkeit(en) als Ressourcen füreinander," in *Wissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit als Ressourcen füreinander. Studien zur Wis-*

To establish their authority and do their religious labour, religious specialists after all had to find their material and economic upkeep somewhere. They thus typically entered into institutionalized or more informal social arrangements with laypeople, who provided them with economic and social capital in return for religious guidance. In some cases, we can observe that structural “alliances” between specific groups of laypeople and of experts formed and eventually engendered structural transformations.

A medieval religious author might, for example, advocate a new type of piety, such as quasi-monastic ascetic practices for laypeople.⁷⁶ To help this endeavour, he might (with or without pursuing this as an objective, reflected goal) become client to an influential group of laypeople, such as high-ranking noblewomen, and dedicate books to them. This would not only enable him to reach a primary goal of helping them towards salvation; the prestige and patronage of the noblewomen might also lead to a popularization of the religious practices advocated in the works, as well as benefiting the author personally. Seen from the other side, pious noblewomen (or, of course, pious bishops or nuns, merchants or craftswomen) might patronize an innovative form of religious practice or a non-established religious author to increase their chance of salvation. But this might also have the (intended or completely unintended) effect of increasing their social status, as it exhibited their piety to the larger social and political community. Such exchanges can be discerned and documented for lower social strata as well as higher ones. Fairly modest town dwellers might for example visit a local confraternity or mendicant convent to be able to hear detailed preaching, participate in the reading of texts and discuss their own conscience without having to invest (much) money.⁷⁷ The religious convent offering these “services” would not only gain popularity from this alliance, but

senschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert, ed. Sybilla Nikolow, Arne Schirmacher (Frankfurt am Main, 2007) 349–362.

76 Among many possible examples, see e.g. Tanja Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of medieval Paris. Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* [The Middle Ages series] (Philadelphia, 2014); Heather Anne Reid, “Patroness of Orthodoxy: Elizabeth Berkeley, John Walton, and the Middle English *Storie of Asneth*, a West Midlands Devotional Text,” in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life*, ed. Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry [Medieval Church Studies 31] (Turnhout, 2014) 405–442.

77 See e.g. Peter Howard, “‘Doctrine, When Preached, Is Entirely Civic’: The Generation of Public Theology and the Role of the Studia of Florence,” in *Communities of Learning: Networks and the Shaping of Intellectual Identity in Europe, 1100–1500*, ed. Constant J. Mews, John N. Crossley [Europa Sacra 9] (Turnhout, 2011), 293–314; Corbellini, “Reconstructing Religious Places of Knowledge” (as above, n. 70).

would also find its particular theology and dogma spread, overall increasing its social capital. Similar cases might be made for early modern religious experts and their audiences, not only for the great reformers but also the many smaller Christian groupings developing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

On a macro-historical level, shifts in the nature of such exchanges can map how the relation between different fields—or, as Bourdieu/Wacquant put it, the “exchange rate” of specific capitals—changed.⁷⁸ The interplay of religion and economy (here on a real, not metaphorical level) is an instructive example: The typical noble strategy of ensuring individual and dynastic salvation, for example, was to found or support religious institutions.⁷⁹ This was a strategy which used non-religious resources to “multiply” the expended religious labour: Though noble patronage centred around individual acts of devotion, much like individual prayer, it also expended great social, economic, and political resources to enhance the effect of this individual investment, for example in the creation or embellishment of a magnificent church or an altar to a particular saint, or in the financing of a group of monks or priests who might engage in prayer or say masses for the soul of the benefactor. Yet over time, the configuration of a local religious field might shift in such a manner that rich donations were devalued as “outward only.” Even wealthy princes might then prefer to show more individual devotion, or to donate to “useful” causes such as a university or new preacher’s prebend rather than building costly churches. As the research of Arnold Angenendt or Berndt Hamm on “countable piety” and the “business of salvation” has shown, both the trend towards an economization of religion and the opposing tendency towards a radical rejection of economic considerations can be observed several times across the pre-modern centuries.⁸⁰

Significant reconfigurations of the relationships between fields could also happen where an alliance between religious and lay elites caused unintended or synergetic effects. The meteoric rise of the mendicant orders of the thirteenth century was, for example, largely enabled by alliances they made with the papacy and with princes and bishops. But they also had close links to urban

78 Bourdieu/Wacquant, “The Logic of Fields” (see above, n. 12), 99.

79 See e.g. Emilia Jamrozak, Janet E. Burton (eds.), *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000–1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power* [Europa sacra 2] (Turnhout, 2006).

80 See e.g. Arnold Angenendt et al., “Gezählte Frömmigkeit,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995), 1–71; Berndt Hamm, “Den Himmel kaufen. Heilskommerzielle Perspektiven des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts,” *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 21 (2006), 239–275.

elites engaged in trade.⁸¹ After the mendicants had become the pastoral elite of choice for some groups of urban merchants, they engaged with these communities' lifestyles and eventually developed a theology which fundamentally changed the view of material wealth: As Lester Little and others have shown, the mendicant theologians favoured a lenient view on the accumulation of wealth through trade and profit, which had hitherto been sanctioned heavily as usury.⁸² Paradoxically, a group advocating radical poverty thus contributed to the legitimation of a profit-oriented accumulation of wealth by urban merchants. This change, which perfectly exemplifies Bourdieu's assumptions about rising religious elites "naturalizing" the social and political agenda of rising new powers, appears to have had a significant impact on economic constellations of the late Middle Ages.

4.2 *Boundary Disputes and Autonomy/Heteronomy between Fields*

As Gorski underlines, dynamics between social fields might also result from conflicts, especially conflicts between actors who "traded" in different capitals. If these conflicts were repeated or otherwise enhanced in their impact, they might eventually also result in transformations of the boundaries and rules of the relevant fields, typically ending in "zero-sum" shifts in which one field gained or lost territory and/or autonomy from another.⁸³ During the early and high Middle Ages, for example, we observe a diverging development of Latin Christian Europe, where many practices of scholarship were subsumed into the religious field, as the educational traditions of Antiquity were adapted by monastic and ecclesiastical centres, and practices of teaching and learning were sacralized.⁸⁴ Conversely, profane intellectual learning lost much of its prestige, so that the "capital" of the former field of scholarship became devalued and the field of scholarship became largely heteronomous, or even a sub-field of the religious field in the affected areas. From the High Middle Ages onwards, specialists for law, medicine, and theology then pushed back the authority of ecclesiastical actors and religious patterns of argumentation within their subfields of learning. Though often beginning with strategies of sacralization of scholarship rather than with straightforward "secularizations,"

81 See e.g. Augustine Thompson, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125–1325* (Philadelphia, 2005).

82 Cf. Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1983).

83 Gorski, "Bourdieuian Theory" (see above, n. 6), 331.

84 See e.g. Sita Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens im Früh- und Hochmittelalter: Autorität, Wissenskonzepte und Netzwerke von Gelehrten* [Norm und Struktur 39] (Cologne, 2011).

this eventually somewhat devalued religious resources within the relevant disciplines.⁸⁵ As a result, the legal, medical, and theological fields or subfields, which mirrored the social rise of new expert elites, gained considerable autonomy.

Some of these transformations created fairly stable configurations of the relevant fields. The legal field for example not only considerably increased its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the religious field but stabilized this position over time in the *ius commune* area, even though there were subfields like canon law, which had stronger affinities to the resources and power positions of the religious field. In contrast, the subfield of theology, which drew strongly on both religious and scholarly expertise in Christian-dominated areas, never quite fixed the relative value of religious and scholarly “capital” during the medieval and early modern periods.⁸⁶ Continually taking up influences from the religious field and its varying subfields, it remained unstable—or, put more positively, highly dynamic.

5 Added Dimensions: Size, Location, and Diversity of the Religious Field

5.1 *Size of the Religious Field, Engagement and Literacy*

A further way to adapt the theory of the religious field to the history of religion is to put more emphasis on dimensions which remained abstract or vague in Bourdieu's model. Gorski in particular has systematically enumerated a number of different historical dynamics inherent in the model of the religious field, and illustrated how these different dimensions can be traced on both micro- and macro-historical levels.⁸⁷ As he suggests, there are some underemphasized dimensions of the religious field which might be added in a historical study. In particular, he suggests taking the “size” (and “shape”⁸⁸) and the “location” of a field and its boundaries into account, to which I would add the “diversity” of the field.

85 See e.g. Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven, CT, 1998).

86 See e.g. Mikolaj Olszewski (Ed.), *What is ‘Theology’ in the Middle Ages? Religious Cultures of Europe (11th–15th Centuries) as Reflected in their Self-Understanding* [Archa verbi. Yearbook for the study of Medieval theology. Subsidia 1] (Münster, 2007).

87 Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory” (see above, n. 6), *passim*.

88 This aspect (see Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory” (see above, n. 6), 332–334) must be left out here, as a historical concretization would demand a more expansive discussion.

As Gorski observes, the dynamics within a religious field will be influenced by the numbers of participants within this field, a dimension he labels the “size” of a religious field. As he admits, this is “relatively easy to conceptualize, but probably harder to measure”⁸⁹—particularly, one must immediately add, for historians of the distant past, who cannot measure church attendance or rely fully on numbers of manuscript copies of religious texts because of missing or fragmentary documentation. Nevertheless, it might be highly intriguing to discuss whether the religious field (say: of northwestern Europe) underwent specific dynamics during the medieval centuries because more people engaged with it—or less people, which, as Gorski argues, might cause “contraction” and a move from rule-oriented to “more anarchic and anomic” situations.⁹⁰ That the number of people who enter or exit a field will cause dynamics of differentiation has also been argued by Uwe Schimank on the basis of a game theoretical model.⁹¹ As this model reminds us, movements of widespread “exit” from the religious field would basically amount to patterns of secularization.

For historians, a more answerable question is, perhaps, whether there were changes in the size of the religious field because of a growing or lessening lay engagement, quite independently of population numbers. Traditionally and more recently, historians of medieval Europe (but also e.g. of the nineteenth century⁹²) have suggested that there were indeed periods of growing lay interest in religion. In particular, it has been argued that there were sustained periods during which socioeconomic growth led to the rise of new elites with disposable income and/or free time for religious engagement, whose presence sped along innovations—namely during the long twelfth and during the long fifteenth centuries.⁹³ Both times, the impression of growing engagement is not only based on indicators showing intensive lay activities. This engagement has also been specifically tied to phases of religious experimentation within

89 Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory,” 331.

90 Ibid.

91 Schimank, “Gesellschaftliche Differenzierungsdynamiken” (see above, n. 15), 271–273.

92 See e.g. Olaf Blaschke, “Abschied von der Säkularisierungslegende. Daten zur Karrierekurve der Religion (1800–1970) im zweiten konfessionellen Zeitalter: eine Parabel,” *Zeitenblicke* 5 (2006), http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Blaschke/index_html/fedoradocuments_view (accessed 24.4.2019).

93 For the twelfth century, see the classic thesis of Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (1935, German trans. Notre Dame, IN, 1995) and the more recent discussion in Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1998); Robert I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (London, 2001). For the fifteenth century, see Van Engen, “Multiple Options” (see above, n. 70) and the introductory chapter above, esp. 321–329.

Christianity (but also e.g. Judaism),⁹⁴ as extant religious institutions were being “stretched” and outgrown, and rising new elites tended to “invest” and seek out not only traditional, but also innovative religious specialists. This furthered the growth of new religious movements during the long twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, and again during the long fifteenth century, up to and including the European Reformations.

While discussing lay engagement is somewhat frustrating for periods in which we cannot quantify it, it does seem important to take it into account as a historical dynamic—in particular, to take it into account as a slow, very gradual and intermittent long-term dynamic, which may nevertheless have had considerable influence on mid- and short-term transformations. One factor that appears to have impacted lay engagement greatly, for example, seems to be changing lay literacy, which combined with growth spurts of the religious field to lead to the rise of new social communities and alliances across fields.

We thus know that during the long twelfth century, growing lay interest and participation led to the formation of a wide variety of religious orders, heterodox movements, and “semi-religious” lay observances (as well as to changes in political, legal, and scholarly cultures).⁹⁵ As John van Engen underlines, literacy and lay “religious literacy” grew—but still, they remained comparatively low, so that the social alliances linking laypeople to religious specialists (the “textual communities” observed by Brian Stock and others⁹⁶) were predicated on strongly asymmetrical distributions of knowledge. During the long fifteenth century, in contrast, we similarly see reforms of extant orders, heterodox and orthodox movements, now often with a much stronger lay presence. But lay literacy was increasing dramatically—about 30% of the population in England could now read, according to research cited by James Simpson.⁹⁷ Religious text traditions were also now translated into European vernaculars or written in the vernacular in the first place, and lay education was developing new patterns. Clerical and lay interpreters of religious texts were thus on a much more equal footing. While scholars and experts had traditionally been dominantly

94 See e.g. Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz. Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* [Jewish culture and contexts] (Philadelphia, 2014).

95 John van Engen, “The Twelfth Century: Reading, Reason, and Revolt in a World of Custom,” in *European Transformations. The Long Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble, John van Engen (Notre Dame, IN, 2012).

96 Cf. Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 1983).

97 James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* [Oxford English Literary History 2] (Oxford, 2004), 5.

drawn from the upper strata, they now often hailed from the new elites rising in commerce and administration, and thus tended to be allied closely to them.⁹⁸

The argument that this growth in religiously engaged, active laypeople might have impacted other dimensions of the religious field is a strong one. Even if it must largely remain a model, it might be tested in comparison to extant and alternative models—such as the assumption that lay participation in the religious field stayed largely the same during the Middle Ages. As briefly noted above, it might be an interesting endeavour to draw on the rich literature on medieval lay religiosity, or on post-Reformation lay initiatives, to ask whether we can document a differentiation of lay engagement, along the lines of the Chinese model developed by Broy, who discusses the differences between fully committed “adherents” of religious specialists, loosely bound, transaction-oriented “clients,” and finally mere “bystanders.”⁹⁹ Even more importantly, it seems interesting to rethink the role of lay religious “production” in this context: One potential dynamic of the late medieval and early modern religious field might be a shift towards a less pronounced division of labour and more religious “self-sufficiency”—in classic Bourdieusian terms, a dynamic of loss of “hierarchy” of the religious field.¹⁰⁰ Another dynamic might lie in pre-modern versions of “exit” strategies, i.e. a growth in religious disaffection and indifference.¹⁰¹

5.2 *Location of the Religious Field and its Boundaries*

These dynamics could also be linked to a second additional dimension of the religious field, relating to its “location” and extent.¹⁰² Whereas a growing engagement of laypeople must mostly be hypothesized, the question where

98 See e.g. Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir dans l'Europe de la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1997); Rainer C. Schwinges, *Studenten und Gelehrte. Studien zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte deutscher Universitäten im Mittelalter* [Education and society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 32] (Leiden, 2008). On translation and its implications, see recently Pavlína Rychterová (Ed.), *Pursuing a New Order, 2 vols, 1: Religious Education in Late Medieval Central and Eastern Central Europe; 11: Late Medieval Vernacularization and the Bohemian Reformation* [The Medieval Translator/Traduire au Moyen Âge 17–18] (Turnhout, 2018–2019).

99 Broy, “Bourdieu” (see above, n. 6), 307–310.

100 On this aspect, compare esp. the contribution of Ian Johnson below.

101 See e.g. Dorothea Weltecke, “Doubts and the Absence of Faith,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), 357–376; Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Les Déniaisés. Irréligion et libertinage au début de l'époque moderne* (Paris, 2014).

102 This dimension is based on Gorski's suggestions concerning boundary changes of the field, cf. Gorski, “Bourdieuian Theory” (see above, n. 6), 331–332.

and on what material basis religious activity took place is often one we can answer more fully. A wide array of studies on forms of sacralization of space by now illustrates how positions and hierarchies within the religious field could be made visible, or became tied to sacral topographies of cities or regions. The location and (as it were) extent of the religious field can thus for example be tied to variable and negotiated private-public boundaries established by these material and architectural arrangements. During the high and late Middle Ages, and in some post-Reformation settings, Christian political authorities for example encouraged religious activity to be integrated deeply into the public life of the polity.¹⁰³ Public displays amalgamating religious identity and social distinction became common in urban spaces, for example in publicly accessible graves in the new mendicant churches of the thirteenth centuries.¹⁰⁴ If laypeople were encouraged to read certain types of religious texts within their homes, on the other hand (or indeed if the private possession of certain books was prohibited) the religious field was extended to include domestic space.¹⁰⁵ This is a particularly visible dynamic of the long fifteenth century, in which domestic and private devotion grew dramatically in many European regions. But domestic space could also be separated (and thus “freed”) from the religious field again. During the early modern period, authorities in the Netherlands thus at times tolerated heterodox opinions as long as they remained confined to a private sphere.¹⁰⁶

Such concrete settings of religious activities can thus be used to establish documentable qualitative differences between recurring historical dynamics. As John Arnold points out, the history of Latin Christianity is indeed not so much characterized by dynamics of “growth” and “decay” of ecclesiastical institutions as by the particular locations and social configurations which became “centres of gravity” of religious change, different “areas in which one can iden-

103 See e.g. Nicholas Terpstra, “Civic Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford, 2014), 148–165; Thompson, *Cities of God* (see above, n. 81); Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, “Kneeling Before God—Kneeling Before the Emperor,” in *Resonances. Historical Essays on Continuity and Change*, ed. Nils Holger Petersen [Ritus et Artes. Traditions and Transformation 5] (Turnhout, 2011), 149–172.

104 See Caroline Bruzelius, *Preaching, Building, and Burying: Friars in the Medieval City* (New Haven, CT, 2014).

105 On these dynamics, see e.g. Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven (eds.), *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford 2018); Maya Corry, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (eds.), *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden 2018).

106 See e.g. Jesse Spohnholz, “Confessional Coexistence in the Early Modern Low Countries,” in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Leiden, 2011), 45–73.

tify the most dense and vibrant agglomeration of activities, ideas and actors."¹⁰⁷ Tracing the changes that occurred when bishops' seats or monasteries, cities or parishes, princely courts or lay homes became host to religious innovations, thus yields one viable path for the description of repeated reconfigurations of the religious field, without suggesting that each phase of innovation was somehow a repetition of earlier ones.

5.3 *Diversity, Orthodoxy and Stability*

A different, but equally significant dynamic might thirdly lie in something I call the "diversity" of the religious field, namely the variance in the field positions occupied by different sorts of specialists. This is an aspect that Bourdieu discusses briefly, but he mainly allots dynamism to tensions between "priests" and "prophets," and views diversity as accommodation, a sort of trade-off resulting from the religious "monopoly" of the church: "It follows that when the church holds an almost perfect monopoly, as in Medieval Europe, the appearance of unity given by the invariance of the liturgy dissimulates the express diversification of techniques of preaching and of curing of souls and the extreme diversity of religious experiences, running the gamut from mystical fideism to magical ritualism."¹⁰⁸

While it is admittedly hard to quantify religious diversity,¹⁰⁹ this dimension and dynamic of the religious field could be emphasized much more strongly. Using an intriguing and important formulation, John van Engen has for example pointed out that the fifteenth-century Latin church witnessed a multiplication of the ways laypeople could participate in religious life, and described this situation as one of "multiple options."¹¹⁰ An earlier parallel could be diagnosed for the new religious movements of the long twelfth century, which confronted the laypeople with a bewildering new array of religious orders and observances (soon criticized as a *nimia diversitas religionum*, too great diversity of religious observances) as well as heterodox movements.¹¹¹ Another growth spurt affect-

¹⁰⁷ John Arnold, "Introduction: A History of Medieval Christianity" in: idem (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, Oxford 2014, 1–22, at 4.

¹⁰⁸ Bourdieu, "Genesis" (see above, n. 8), 29.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Johannes C. Wolfart, "Increasing Religious Diversity: Historiographical Criticism of a Current Paradigm," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21.4 (2018), 63–87.

¹¹⁰ Van Engen, "Multiple Options" (see above, n. 70).

¹¹¹ Cf. Grundmann, *Religious Movements* (see above, n. 93); Andreas Pietsch and Sita Steckel, "New Religious Movements before Modernity? Considerations from a Historical Perspective," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21.4 (2018), 13–37.

ing the relative numbers and diversity of religious specialists of course resulted from the European Reformations with their divergences of new, local confessional churches, transnational spiritualist groupings and informal and ambiguous religious practices.¹¹² To this, we must add the recurring clashes between specialists representing different religions in multi-religious “oligopolies,” for example in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, where shifts in the geopolitical and military balance between Christian and Islamic princes led to destabilizations (and ensuing re-stabilizations) of local multi-religious fields.¹¹³ Of course, we also witness reductions in the diversity of the religious field, particularly homogenization or “normative centring”¹¹⁴ driven by local religious and political elites aiming to “reform” or “purify” religion while also strengthening their political control. During the long fifteenth century and the competing Reformation movements, both tendencies largely overlapped, creating extreme dynamism. I would thus suggest observing “diversity” (here used to encompass both intra- and inter-religious difference as well as “heretical” dissent) as one of the dimensions of the religious field, treating it as a complementary dimension to the phenomenon Bourdieu calls “orthodoxy,” i.e. the compliance of the laity with the religious *illusio*, the rules and values advocated by the specialists.

One may indeed remark that the effect Bourdieu describes as a loss of “orthodoxy” of the religious field has in recent years largely been re-theorized in the investigation of religious pluralization. The sociologist Peter L. Berger, who has developed an adjusted theory of religious modernization no longer focused on secularization, but on religious pluralization, for example links religious plurality and the “dissonances” it generates to a “relativization” of religious

112 See e.g. Volker Leppin, “Von der Polarität zur Vereindeutigung. Zu den Verhandlungen in Kirche und Frömmigkeit zwischen spätem Mittelalter und Reformation,” in *Frömmigkeit, Theologie, Frömmigkeitstheologie: Contributions to European church history: Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert, and Roland Lieben [Studies in the history of Christian traditions] (Leiden, 2005), 299–315; Andreas Pietsch, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (eds.), *Konfessionelle Ambiguität. Uneindeutigkeit und Verstellung als religiöse Praxis in der Frühen Neuzeit* [Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 214] (Gütersloh, 2013).

113 Discussed e.g. in Daniel König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2015); John V. Tolan, Gilles Veinstein, Henry Laurens, *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton, NJ, 2013).

114 Berndt Hamm, “Normative Zentrierung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Beobachtungen zu Religiosität, Theologie und Ikonologie,” in *Religiosität im späten Mittelalter: Spannungspole, Neuaufbrüche, Normierungen*, ed. Reinhold Friedrich and Wolfgang Simon [Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation 54], Tübingen 2011, 3–40.

truth-claims.¹¹⁵ In the 1970s, he first described this dynamic as the emergence of a “heretical imperative” resulting from the modern situation of plurality. Plurality, he argued, generated a necessity for everyone to choose one religion among many. His reworked model of 2014 also admits the possibility that there may have been religious plurality in different phases of history.¹¹⁶ Arguing historically (though again drawing largely on outdated historical research), Charles Taylor has similarly suggested that one of the most important qualitative changes between pre-modern and modern religion consists in the necessity to choose religion as one option among many.¹¹⁷

For historians, these models display the typical vagueness and insouciance of certain sociological schools, which deal in typologies and contrasts of “traditional” and “modern” rather than historical analysis. But the connections between the diversification of specialists on the religious field and specific effects of relativization—or at least, a considerable dynamization of religious rules, norms, and ideas—are intriguing: While the constellations of pre-modern European history show only very circumscribed dynamics generated by positions we might link to secularism, many regions of Europe saw specific local configurations of religious co-existence between pagans, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and heretics resulting in debates and polemics. These often forced the competing religious specialists to explain, “vulgarize,” and defend their own teachings, thus de-mystifying them at least partially.¹¹⁸ This dynamic may thus be linked to a considerable loss of “hierarchy” of the religious field, mirroring the decreasing asymmetry of religious knowledge between specialists and laypeople. Arguably, this would have had relativizing effects—which nevertheless remain hard to quantify, and must therefore be described in their specific, qualitative developments.¹¹⁹

In some constellations, for example within the high medieval Latin church with its pronounced claim to universality and homogeneity, even the level of intra-religious, legitimate diversity (for example between religious orders) may have led to processes of relativization, as the growing number of religious

115 Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Boston, 2014).

116 Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York, 1979).

117 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

118 See e.g. Reima Välimäki, “Transfers of anti-Waldensian material from a polemical treatise to a didactic text,” *Medieval Worlds* 7 (2018), 153–169.

119 See Pohlig and Steckel, eds., *Über Religion entscheiden* (as above, n. 28), esp. the introduction.

orders and movements of the long twelfth century caused many episodes of internal conflict and polemicizing, in which particular rituals, norms, values, and practices (the value of prayer vs. manual labour, poverty vs. almsgiving, asceticism vs. religious reading etc.) were problematized and thus partially de-sacralized. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these critical discourses were revisited and appropriated by lay voices, a dynamic that modern research has largely classed as “anticlericalism,” and interpreted as precursors of the Renaissance or the upheavals of the Reformations.¹²⁰ But the relevant discourses typically have their core in dynamics of competition and pluralization, and it might be worthwhile to recognize this “diversity” of the religious field as a generator of change which may have caused further transformations (such as the loss of lay investment in the church and “orthodoxy” in the Bourdieusian sense).

Admittedly, this focus on diversity implies losing an important nuance: Bourdieu’s concept of orthodoxy is tied to his argument about the “naturalizing” and “consecrating” effects of religion, and about the laypeople’s “misrecognition” of the contingent power dynamics underlying the positions of the field. Essentially, his concern is about belief, about the investment and commitment of non-specialists in the power hierarchies they find themselves involved in. Insisting on precision, one could furthermore argue that a relativization of belief and trust is not necessarily and not always a consequence of diversification of the “market,” as there may be strategies of coping with diversity, and the most ardent “adherents” of specific religious elites would probably resist relativization.

However, from a historical point of view, this important dimension (which Bourdieu is right to insist on) almost appears as a kind of meta-dimension: How far non-specialists become or remain invested in the ideological constructions of religious specialists seems to depend on many factors, among them pluralization, individualization, political pressures, structures of public debate, and countervailing ideological production. Rather than speaking of all these different things under the problematic label of “orthodoxy,” it might make sense to differentiate. One potential descriptor of these dimensions of the religious field might be its overall stability as compared to fluidity or dynamism. Another issue—though strongly connected to the diversity of the field as well—might

120 Classically, cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien. Ein Versuch* (Basel, 1860); see also Peter A. Dykema, Heiko A. Oberman (eds.), *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* [Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 51] (Leiden, 2003).

be the polarization of the field, i.e. the bandwidth of the typical positions on the field in combination with the degree to which these accepted or actively excluded one another.¹²¹

5.4 *Revisiting the Internal Dynamics of the Religious Field: The Example of the Long Fifteenth Century*

With these additions in mind, it may be instructive to revisit the dimensions and dynamics of the religious field foregrounded by Bourdieu, i.e. his outline of the development of the hierarchy and orthodoxy of the religious field of north-western Europe. The theme discussed in this thematic section, the religious culture of the laypeople during the “long fifteenth century,” furnishes a very good example for this.¹²²

Rather than one homogeneous medieval configuration of the European religious field enduring until the upheaval of the Reformation, it is clear today that there were many different, interrelated reconfigurations during the long period we still call “Middle Ages,” and many more during the early modern centuries. In all of these reconfigurations, which we may imagine as episodic and intermittent (as well as of varying scale and impact), the different dynamics of the religious field would have interplayed in complex ways. To accentuate the role of slow, gradual change as well as more short-term changes, one may for example look to the social dynamics of the long fifteenth century, which inexorably eroded the hierarchy between specialists and laypeople. The increasing diversity of active religious specialists, present from the twelfth century onwards, gradually began to interface with the emergence of new groups of laypeople from the early fourteenth century onwards. These new groups—merchants, administrators, but also urban craftspeople—now disposed of various resources: money, time, access to different urban religious centres. They were increasingly literate and versed in the interpretation of vernacular or even Latin religious texts. A growing body of religious literature in various vernaculars was created for them (or for others, and appropriated by them), not least including biblical texts.¹²³ They experimented with new forms of religious devotion, or, even more importantly, adapted the practices of religious orders, in a development beginning during the twelfth and thirteenth century, which has been called the “monasticization of the laity.”¹²⁴ With devo-

121 On this aspect, see the forthcoming volume Pohligh and Steckel, eds., *Über Religion entscheiden* (see above, n. 28).

122 See the relevant section (321–329) in the introductory chapter above.

123 Corbellini et al., “Challenging the Paradigms” (see above, n. 59).

124 See especially Christine Caldwell Ames, “Obeying God, Not Man: Heresy, Inquisitors, and

tional practices moving into the private sphere and lay elites closely allied with religious specialists and scholars, laypeople acted as patrons of the religious and ordained clergy. They met them in their own houses, in confraternities or in dedicated chapels rather than in the public spaces of worship built to underline the authority of the priestly class. While laypeople often engaged in religious activities together with religious specialists, we also observe occasional groups of readers consisting solely of laypeople.¹²⁵

Under these conditions, most secondary bases of the authority of the established clergy were under pressure, so that the hierarchy and the orthodoxy of the field were reduced: Differences in knowledge, in social status, in political power were all diminished, and the sacramental power of clerics thus lost many of its supporting buttresses. At the same time, the laypeople's ability to evaluate and compare the diverse religious elites grew apace—while criticizing and evaluating the life of the religious had been the province of the Latinate during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and remained largely confined to oral discourse among laypeople, the fourteenth century witnessed a plethora of “critical” and anticlerical writings in the vernacular, by laypeople of various shades. Yet the overall loss of hierarchy was a gradual process, which produced many successive iterations of conflicts in which all these dynamics played together, and resulted in many different reconfigurations of the religious field—medium-range dynamics, as in the many different reform initiatives characterizing the European religious field of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or large-scale changes, as in the political upheavals of the reforms and Reformations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which resulted in a growing loss of autonomy of the religious field, now increasingly influenced by regional politics.

6 Conclusions

In summary, Bourdieu's theoretical approach merits at least consideration by historians of religion because it answers a pressing need. For those interested in communicating across the boundary lines between medieval and modern

Obedience in the Dominican Order,” in: *Making and Breaking the Rules: Discussion, Implementation, and Consequences of Dominican Legislation*, ed. Cornelia Linde (Oxford, 2017), 39–40; ead., “Does Inquisition” (see above, n. 37), 23–27.

¹²⁵ See various contributions in Sabrina Corbellini, ed., *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* [Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 25], (Turnhout, 2013).

historians of religion (and between history, Religious Studies, and the sociology of religion) adopting some of the theoretical underpinnings of this theory may provide a meta language for interdisciplinary communication. Unlike adaptations of the charged terms “Renaissance,” “humanism,” “reform,” and so on, this language does not immediately cause specific teleologies to snap into place in the minds of non-specialized scholars. The same point can be made for interdisciplinary communication between scholars engaging with different religions during the pre-modern centuries. To them, the specific dimensions and dynamics foregrounded by the theory of the religious field—such as changes in the location, engagement, diversity, or hierarchy of the religious field and its relations with other fields—may provide shared lines of inquiry for debates cutting across disciplines and specializations.

As pointed out above, another particularly strong point of the theory—and in fact, of the very term of “the religious field,” which has already been adapted in other theoretical models¹²⁶—is its potential to serve as an analytical term denoting religion as a historical discourse and “essentially contested concept.”¹²⁷ Arguing for use of the term in research not otherwise indebted to Bourdieu, Thoralf Klein has for example argued that the term “religious field” suggests “a terrain in which the diverse and distinct religious actors, concepts, practices and traditions meet, interact and contend with one another.”¹²⁸ This may well be a minimal definition that conserves Bourdieu’s insistence on the historical self-definition of the field, but does not force historians to buy any further into the Bourdieusian theoretical edifice than they may want to. Given the warnings against the modern, constructed, and Eurocentric character of the concept of “religion,” adopting the term “the religious field” to denote the historical negotiation of religion in this sense may then be useful: While the term “the religious field” may not solve all problems, it expresses its nature as an analytic, modern term more clearly than “religion” itself.

From a historian’s perspective, the further challenge and potential of Bourdieu’s overall theoretical approach to the religious field mostly lies in its large scale—a scale that cannot be adopted by historians in the core of their work, which will remain specialized, but which is nevertheless present as a backdrop to our historical thinking. One of the most intriguing facts about Bourdieu’s theory of the religious field is that he offers a theory of society rather than a theory of religion alone. If we understand religious history as part of historical scholarship, that means that we are interested in the role religion played in

126 See n. 10 above.

127 See Reuter, *Religion* (see above, n. 6), 22.

128 Klein and Meyer, “Beyond the Market” (see above, n. 10), 529–534, there 530.

historical societies, and must frame the history of religion as a part of such a history of societies. Field theory is a framework that encourages historical scholars to think about religion with all its connections to other areas of life. Even those researchers who are not keen to adopt Bourdieusian theory may therefore find that they profit from consideration of the many connections between different historical dynamics that this model offers and demands. Conceiving our individual historical fields of expertise—the study of experts or of laypeople, of everyday men and women, of orthodox *virtuosi* or dissenters, of religious texts, rituals, or materialities—as embedded in a set of larger dynamics may force us to re-frame and re-think the very questions which the big theories of the early twentieth century placed at the foundations of historical and sociological studies, but can no longer answer to our current satisfaction.

This also leads to the criticisms made of Bourdieu's own modelling of the historical religious field. As I have argued, there are several problematic points in his 1971 discussion, which can in large part be explained by the outdated scholarship underlying Bourdieu's historical argumentation. A stringent historical "update" of Bourdieu's work needs to develop a more balanced view of the laity and lay religious production. It also needs a more balanced and differentiated approach to the diversity of religious specialists within the religious field, taking situations of inter-religious plurality and intra-religious diversity into account. To make headway with the latter points, and to open the model up to discussion for scholars working on religions other than Christianity, it seems especially necessary to handle the Weberian term of the religious "monopoly" with more care than Bourdieu does, keeping it firmly in the realm of ideal types where it belongs. It may indeed be that historians with a focus on the Mediterranean and the Islamic world find it necessary to combine a Bourdieusian approach further with religious "market" models, as suggested by several scholars working on Asia.¹²⁹

One of the most important open questions posed by the model of the religious field is therefore how we can scale it to fit our different frames of historical observation. As most scholars working on religion in history scrutinize specific, localized contexts in any case, this problem can be solved provisionally by assuming that we deal with local and regional configurations of the religious field in most situations. But generalizations on a supra-regional scale remain a challenge, as it seems apparent that even a perspective restricting itself to Europe encompasses massively different configurations of the religious field,

129 See the literature in n. 11 and esp. Broy, "Bourdieu" (see above, n. 6); Klein and Meyer, "Beyond the market" (see above, n. 10).

so that it becomes difficult to speak of a “European religious field” as anything but a problematic high-level abstraction. The provisional suggestion offered here instead is that it may make sense to be more specific, and name particular regions and periods or centuries. But this leads to further questions—for what is “western Europe” exactly, and how far does a comparable configuration of its religious field stretch during a given century? What about enclaves, such as those typical for persecuted minorities? The theory of the religious field thus cannot solve all the problems presenting themselves in the current attempts to globalize the history of religion during the pre-modern period. Where the specific aspects of periodization and spatialization are concerned, it rather forces historians to confront the fact that certainties about the regional and chronological extent of historical dynamics have been lost while new consensus has not yet formed.

Especially when put side by side with recent suggestions for narrative and analytic frameworks for a history of religious culture (and some other fields), it is thus clearly apparent that the strength of this theoretical model does not lie in any inherent ability to produce new narratives, but in its quality as a framework of analysis, which allows us to juxtapose widely differing religious dynamics such as those of medieval Europe and China. On a chronological scale, discussing different historical shifts in the hierarchy of the religious field or in the changing relationship between religion and learning, or religion and politics, also allows us to model specific conflict constellations as recurring but not repetitive or “cyclical.”¹³⁰ Of course here, as in other aspects, the potential of the framework will largely depend on how well it proves to be adaptable to actual historical work. It remains up to historians of religion to test it further.

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¹³⁰ On the problems of these descriptive metaphors, see Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy” (see above, n. 2), 261–265.