Developed out of a conference held at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome in 2010, this collection of essays sheds new light on the complex dynamics that existed between lay readers and the religious text in the later Middle Ages. By approaching this subject through a number of different concerns, including the use of the vernacular, the rise and influence of print culture, and the contexts of book production and reading practices, the essays in this volume not only provide a comprehensive consideration of the topic, but also demonstrate the richness of this field of study. Indeed, in her introduction Sabrina Corbellini states that although much scholarly attention has been directed towards works of religious literature that were intended for a lay audience, “the specific question of the religious emancipation of the laity, through the active readership of religious literature in the vernacular and in particular the active role of lay people in the transmission and production of religious knowledge, is still virtually a blind spot in research activities” (p. 4). By emphasising the need to examine a religious text in tandem with an understanding of particular reading practices, all of the essays in this collection highlight how the reading activities of lay audiences contributed to what Corbellini terms “the cultural transformation” of the later Middle Ages.

In order to explore this topic from a number of perspectives, the collection is divided into four broad sections. The first four essays examine uses of the vernacular in religious literature and reflect on how such works may skirt the borders of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This topic is interestingly explored in the opening essay by Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen. Through a close examination of the theological writings of Beatrice of Nazareth and Margarete of Porete, Pedersen draws attention to the perhaps problematic factors which
determined if a work was deemed to be orthodox or heterodox, particularly in the case of women’s writing. In the contributions by Sabrina Corbellini and John J. Thompson, the issue of lay readership is pushed more to the fore. Focusing on a number of examples from late-medieval Italy, Corbellini explores the reading practices of lay audiences and draws attention to their active pursuit of religious knowledge, while Thompson considers how such works as Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* shape the reader’s engagement with the text. Thompson’s accomplished discussion of Love’s work also draws attention to the complexity of late-medieval literary culture and encourages us to rethink how such texts may redefine understandings of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Lastly, Eyal Poleg offers an enlightening analysis of Wycliffite Bibles and notes that the layout of these texts reflects an engagement with orthodox and heterodox practices; he notes that “subtle changes assisted to dissociate many Wycliffite Bibles from Lollardy and enhance their affinity to the mass-produced Latin Bibles of the thirteenth and fourteenth century” (p. 73).

In the second section, which focuses on the impact of printing on the continent, Koen Goudriaan begins by discussing the church’s utilisation of the printing press as a means to disseminate religious knowledge. Goudriaan’s contribution is particularly praiseworthy as it uncovers some of the complexity of the relationship between the church and the “increasing interest of the laity in reading religious books” (p. 103); indeed, Goudriaan concludes that “the importance of the Modern Devotion in preparing the laity to assume the role of audience for the products of the new medium may have been overestimated” (p. 116). Mart van Duijn’s contribution is also insightful and offers an intelligent and thoughtful analysis of the Delft Bible. In addition to a consideration of the strategies used by printers to target a broad audience, the discussion of the annotations and marks of ownership found in Delft Bibles is interesting as it explores different reading strategies and highlights that many of these bibles were owned by members of the laity. Kristian Jensen concludes this section with an interesting and very scholarly analysis of the printing and dissemination of the works of St Augustine.

The essays by Suzan Folkerts, Werner Williams-Krapp, and Anna Adamska all examine the relationship between lay readers and vernacular religious works in the light of specific reading cultures and contexts. Suzan Folkerts’s discussion of Middle Dutch New Testaments is noteworthy for drawing attention to the fact that many of these manuscripts were owned by women. She goes on to highlight the interesting differences between those manuscripts owned by Canonesses Regular, which were laid out as lectionaries, and those owned by tertiaries, which accorded with the Vulgate. According to Folkerts, such differences are “an indication that [the manuscripts] were used differ-