Foreword

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Most scholarship of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has automatically defined 'religious dissent' as 'heresy', with studies proceeding along the parameters of the history of persecution and repression. Such a trend originated with the 'source critical' approach pioneered by Herbert Grundmann's landmark study *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, in which all religious movements "achieved realisation either in religious orders or in heretical sects."[2] Later, it found its most influential expression in Robert E. Lerner's *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*,[3] in which the historian attempts to discover the 'real' people beneath the filters of ecclesiastical and inquisitorial language and imagery. While ground-breaking in its reluctance to merely repeat ecclesiastical authorities' polemical and stereotyped descriptions of those deemed 'heretics', this approach also led to two distinct but related strands of scholarship. One focuses on identifying whether a group or individual was 'really' heretical, evincing a concern either with weighing up alternative beliefs against official doctrine, or with examining an individual's beliefs as they appear in inquisitorial documents and other sources and attempting to judge whether they belonged to a particular 'sect'. Such an approach long defined studies of mystical or textual modes of dissent, where certain thinkers and their texts were framed within an either/or model of 'orthodox' and 'heretical' based on comparison to certain sets of doctrines.[4] The second strand of research questions the legitimacy of the sources entirely and denies the very existence of dissenting heretical groups, arguing that they were entirely constructed by ecclesiastical authorities. This latter strand, centred mostly around the study of so-called 'Catharism' in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and exemplified in the work of scholars such as R.I. Moore, Mark Gregory Pegg, Monique Zerner, and Uwe Brunn, among others, has spearheaded the debate for the past thirty years.[5]

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[1] This foreword, along with the special issue that follows, is the result of the collaboration of its two co-editors with a forward-thinking and committed team of early career scholars, namely, in alphabetical order, Andra Alexiu, Rachel Ernst, Stamatia Noutsou, and Justine Trombley. We hereby recognize their authorship.

[2] Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik*.

[3] Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*.

[4] For example, see the essays in Stirnimann and Imbach, eds., *Eckhardus Theutonicus, homo doctus et sanctus. Nachweise und Berichte zum Prozess gegen Meister Eckhart*. See also Colledge, "Liberty of Spirit: 'The Mirror of Simple Souls'," in *Theology of Renewal*, ed. L. K. Shook, 100–117; Orcibal, "Le 'Miroir des simples âmes' et la 'secte' du Libre Esprit," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 176 (1969): 35-60; and Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*.

[5] See Moore, *The War on Heresy. Faith and Power in Medieval Europe*; Zerner, ed., *Inventer l'hérésie? Discours polémiques et pouvoirs avant l'inquisition*; Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels:*

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These older models are now beginning to be challenged. Scholarship has started to move away from binary views of heresy and orthodoxy and attempts at definitive categorisation. While focusing on the 'long fifteenth century', John Van Engen investigated if "energies cutting across locales and groups, orthodoxy and heresy, devotion and worldliness" can be detected and how these were linked to the multiple religious options which according to him characterised this era.[6] In grappling with the categories of "religious, religion, religions" scholars have tended to operate from the assumption that one knows religion when one sees it, as Christine Caldwell Ames observed.[7] Thus, rather than investigating the complex dynamics which tend to characterise human interaction and their various implications, previous studies have prioritised questions rooted in a clear-cut and unambiguous categorisation and periodisation. A recent collection of essays edited by Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane and Anne Lester critiques Herbert Grundmann's model of "orders versus heretical movements," highlighting instead the various experiences and statuses that existed between these two ends of the spectrum in medieval religious life by looking at individuals and groups who fit into neither category.[8] In a similar vein, a collection edited by Matthias Pohlig and Sita Steckel seeks to define religious decision making and its implications in various contexts pertaining not only to the late Middle Ages, but also to the Early Modern Period.[9]

This special issue is situated in dialogue with these studies but also addresses questions that they leave unanswered. Like them, contributors emphasise diversity and move away from binary models and methods which rely on distinct labels and strict categorisation. Taking the 'blurring of boundaries' as its central organising principle of inquiry, the global aim of this issue is to establish a new framework for the study of religious dissent in the European Middle Ages. Broadening the chronological scope of previous studies by including examples from as early as the eleventh century, the articles that follow look into a variety of religious contexts across Europe. In sum, authors interrogate and challenge the traditional assumption that dissent is automatically heterodox in nature. Addressing the current lack of vocabulary to describe the individuals, ideas, and organisations that did not conform to either side of the orthodoxy/heresy binary, one of

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The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246; Brunn, *Des Contestataires aux 'Cathares:' discours de réforme et propagande antihérétique dans le pays du Rhin et de la Meuse avant l'Inquisition*; Borst, *Die Katharer*. The most recent contributions to this controversial issue can be found in Sennis, *Cathars in Question*, and Biget, Caucanas, Fournié, and le Blévec, eds. *Le "catharisme" en questions*. For a similar approach to the Waldensian movement, see Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps, 1480–1580*; Merlo, *Valdesi e valdismi medievali: itinerari e proposte di ricerca*.

[6] Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church." More recently, with a special attention to the public aspect of decision making, see Van Engen, "Freedom, Obligation, and Customary Practice: The Pursuit of Religious Life in the Later Medieval and Early Reform Periods."

[7] Caldwell Ames, "Medieval Religious, Religions, Religion."

[8] Deane and Lester, eds., *Between Orders and Heresy: Rethinking Medieval Religious Movements*.

[9] Pohlig and Steckel, eds., *Über Religion entscheiden / Choosing my Religion: Religiöse Optionen und Alternativen im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Christentum / Religious Options and Alternatives in Medieval and Early Modern Christianity*.

our objectives is to start building an applicable lexicon, as well as to discuss the utility (or lack thereof) of such labels in future historiographical narratives.

As recently shown by Sita Steckel, working with the 'religious field' metaphor coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu can be fruitful for historians as well.[10] The most far-reaching aspect of Bourdieu's concept is that borders are negotiated continuously. Zooming in on indistinct boundaries can prove to be a useful instrument for the historian, as it facilitates the reconnection of phenomena, groups, and individuals who are normally separated by different fields of research or expertise. Instead of asking what heresy is or who the heretics are –questions to which the study of dissidence is often limited– this special issue aims to find out the *means* by which boundaries were blurred, how these differed between contexts, and why. These issues go hand in hand with an active questioning of the existing periodisation and of the historical narratives which generated them.

By incorporating material from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a time when several new religious orders and heretical sects were established, this special issue illustrates how the traditional polarised historiographical model evolved, as well as how porous the membrane between 'orthodox' and 'heretical' was, even at the beginning. Furthermore, this issue interrogates the perspectives of individuals and sects who were 'othered' by their contemporaries on the basis of religious experience. Exploring the ways in which the ideas of medieval dissent paved the way for the diversification of religious thought in the Early Modern Period and the reactions against it is the next natural step that we will tackle in future collaborations.

[10] Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux." For an updated conceptualization of the idea of boundaries of the religious field see: Reuter, "Grenzarbeiten am Religiösen Feld - Religionsrechtskonflikte und -Kontroversen im Verfassungsstaat"; Broy, "Bourdieu, Weber und Rational Choice: Versuch einer Weiterentwicklung des religiösen Feldmodells am Beispiel Chinas." For the applicability of the concept to historical analysis see: Steckel, "Historicizing the Religious Field. Adapting Theories of the Religious Field for the Study of Medieval and Early Modern Europe"; see also, Große Kracht, "Das ‚Katholische Feld'. Perspektiven auf den Katholizismus des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts im Anschluss an Pierre Bourdieu."

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