

Call for Papers

Discovering the Riches of the Word Religious Reading, Reform and Counter-Reform in Early Modern Europe

University of Groningen, The Netherlands, 12-13 April 2012

International workshop organized by the ERC-funded project *Holy Writ and Lay Readers: A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Late Middle Ages* (www.rug.nl/let/holyandlay) and the Groningen Research Institute for the Study of Culture (ICOG).

The *Holy Writ and Lay Readers* project investigates the links between lay religiosity and vernacular reading cultures during the late Middle Ages. The members of the research team and Bart Ramakers, chair of historical Dutch literature at the University of Groningen, intend to publish a volume on religious reading cultures in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, to be published in the *Intersections – Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* series (Brill Publishers, Leiden), and edited by Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet and Bart Ramakers.

After a successful series of papers presented by international scholars at the International Medieval Conference in Leeds in July 2011 (*Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages in City, Cloister, and Court*), the project now organizes a second expert meeting, this time focussing on the early modern period. The aim is to analyse the interaction between lay religiosity and vernacular reading against the background of reform and counter-movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most notably the continuities and discontinuities with the late Middle Ages. This small-scale workshop will bring together a select group of international experts in order to allow and stimulate discussion on the central theme.

Early modern Europe witnessed an “oceanic” production of religious texts, both in Latin and in the vernacular. This phenomenon certainly had its roots in the culture of the later Middle Ages, but it was enhanced by the religious and ideological debates between partisans of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. Many of these texts have therefore only been scrutinized for their arguments relating to the contemporary religious debate, not for the ways they mirror aspects of lay religiosity and vernacular reading. Most of these texts, however, have received no scholarly attention whatsoever.

An innovative approach to religious texts has recently been proposed in several groundbreaking publications on religious reading—as a part of a more general history of reading—in the British Isles during the late Middle Ages (Bryan 2008, Campbell 2010) and the early sixteenth century (Barratt 2009). These studies focus on the particularities of religious reading as a form of devotion, as well as on aspects of interiority, individuality, and identity formation. Other important themes are reading as an instrument of religious reform, and orthodox religious reading as an answer to dissenting movements.

For this international workshop the organizers propose to follow these examples and to concentrate on the readers and reading practices of religious texts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to widen the scope from the British Isles to Western Europe at large, thus creating a comparative European perspective. We do not only concentrate on prose texts, but include poetry and (reading) drama. Contributions are invited that address questions like: how were religious texts

approached by different groups during the early modern period? Was religious reading by laymen encouraged or was it prohibited, and why? Were there changes and/or was there continuity during the transition—the “great divide”—from the late medieval to the early modern period? Were there specific religious reading techniques that distinguished lay from clerical, Protestant from Catholic, male from female, Latinate from non-Latinate readers? What were the attitudes of these groups towards sacred and religious texts? What kinds of directions for religious reading can be inferred from the texts themselves and from the cultural contexts in which they functioned? How can we characterize the process of religious identity formation in early modern Europe based on approaches to sacred and religious texts? Did religious reading contribute to the interiorization of religion and, consequently, to the process of individualization, or did “textual communities” shape the reception of religious texts? Was there interaction and dialogue between the authors and their readers? Did readers become authors?

Participants will be invited to present a paper during the international workshop in Groningen. A selection of papers will be included in the *Intersections* volume, to be published in 2013 (<http://www.brill.nl/publications/intersections>).

One page abstracts, including a short c.v. and references to three key publications, can be sent to Sabrina Corbellini (s.corbellini@rug.nl), Margriet Hoogvliet (m.hoogvliet@rug.nl), and Bart Ramakers (b.a.m.ramakers@rug.nl) before 5 December 2011. The organizers will cover the travel and accommodation expenses of invited speakers.

References:

- Charlotte Appel-Morten Fink-Jensen (eds), *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011)
Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008)
Alexandra Barratt, *Anne Bulkeley and her Book: Fashioning Female Piety in Early Tudor England* (Turnhout, 2009)
Kirsty Campbell, *The Call to Read: Reginald Pecock's Books and Textual Communities* (Notre Dame, 2010)