LIVED RELIGION AND GENDER IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EXPERIENCES OF GENDER AND FAITH

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The pre- and early modern world has often been described as an inherently religious one. There was no sphere of life where religion was irrelevant. Religion explained the basics of cosmology and society. Belief systems influence social relations even today, and in the medieval and early modern eras, religious ideas shaped some of the most important secular institutions as well as the overall social theory: the three estates were God-ordained with specific duties, and the idea of the two swords – that is, religious and secular power governing the world – was well established (even if constantly debated) by the Late Middle Ages. As such, religion was played out within the web of power relations inherent in societies. In addition, religion stipulated times of work, worship and leisure for everyone; it instructed what people were supposed or allowed to eat and when, and how, they lived, woke up and went about their daily tasks. Furthermore, religion justified social hierarchies, relationships of power and taxation, economic relationships, and politics and warfare. There were, however, many different interpretations of how exactly religion's demands were to be interpreted. Everyone had their own opinions about which of the many aspects of religious or more mundane life was to be given priority in any situation. More importantly, the relationship between religion and mundane private or social life was not one-way. Rather, religion developed in society to meet society's needs, and society developed in a religious culture that guided both expectations or aims and the means to meet them.

This book has two thoroughgoing themes that we intend to investigate from the late medieval period (ca. the 14th century) to the early modern period (until ca. the 18th century). These themes are religion (or faith) and gender, both of which we also understand in a specific way, as lived and experienced. The meaning of these two concepts, religion and gender, has changed in time, space and culture: people in the 14th century understood them differently from those of the

Reformation period and from what we do today. In the medieval and early modern period, they were evolving processes, not fixed categories. As experienced and lived, they were both individual and shared, and thereby they created the bonds that bound individuals to their communities and ultimately formed societies. Religion created the sense of belonging essential for fostering connectedness within communities. Religion and gender also offered a means of engagement, for example in collective ritual participation. As lived and experienced, religion and gender were also always meaningful and important. They had tangible confluences in people's lives and the ways societies were structured – if they did not, religion and gender were not lived, but remained theoretical, which we are not interested in here. Rather, this book will show people investing energy, time and a considerable amount of emotional, social and economic resources in matters of religion and gender – not, of course, for nothing, but because they found this investment at least potentially productive.

Lived religion, lived gender

There have been numerous attempts in the last four decades to shed light on the history of popular religion as opposed to official theology and highflying ideology. This move reflects the democratic idea that the 'popular' must have had more practical importance for ways of life, economic choices and even political acts than theological jargon, which the not-so-well-educated nobility and uneducated 'real people' probably understood and cared for as little in the medieval or early modern period as we do today. Trying to get at 'popular' conceptions of religion and faith as separate from what theologians thought or taught – to shift the focus from what a few men thought to what many people did – has led to a dichotomous still-life picture still with often inherently judgemental or devaluative underpinnings. Another problem has been that the members of the populace rarely sat down to write coherent explanations of how they saw their religion. Rather, they went from day to day conducting their lives. Their thoughts on religion were generally only recorded when the authorities tried to pin them down and control them, for example in catechism hearings or church or secular court investigations of religious matters or offences. Such situations are likely to emphasise the dichotomy between the 'popular' and the 'elite(s)'.

Rather than recording what they thought about religion and faith or gender, people lived out their concepts in daily life. This process of living one's life in a way that reflects concepts of religion and gender – in short, whatever they did: signs, gestures and bodily practices – is what this book uses as a channel to access medieval people's concepts of religion and gender. We approach them as normal and inseparable parts of the day-to-day lives of lay people.

We have decided to use *lived* religion[1] as our conceptual tool. Lived religion is not a particularly new concept. *La religion vécue* was used already by French social historians in the 1970s, although it originally meant largely the same as popular religion in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, *La religion vécue* emphasised

the impact and influence of faith and belief in people's daily lives, which later came to denote the essential core of 'lived religion'.[2] In the anglophone sphere, lived religion was first adopted and developed by the 20th-century US historians and religious anthropologists Robert Orsi, David Hall and Meredith McGuire. The essential starting point was the observation that people did not adopt religious or theological systems in their coherent totality, nor as given, but rather they picked and chose as if from a buffet table. Hall, Orsi and McGuire thought this was an element of modern religion, but since their time, many historians of the medieval and early modern have pointed out that the people of those eras did the same. It was nevertheless important for lived religion scholars, especially perhaps for the historians, that not every action qualified as lived religion: it had to be a purposeful and structural – ritualised – action through which the community or the church defined what it was to be religious or believed. As such, lived religion emphasised practices, intentionality and orientation.[3]

As far as medieval and early modern societies are concerned, it is much more difficult to separate intentional or purposeful ritual religiosity from the less conscious and less directly religious. The spheres of the religious and the secular were inexorably intertwined and entangled. Faith was part of mundane life. We see religion essentially as an element of daily life, a way to live, interact and participate in one's community. For the book at hand, the links between religion and daily life are essential, and we focus on how people used religion in their communal interaction when fulfilling their duties as parents, husbands and wives, and members of the community. The term 'religion' as we use it here does not refer to a single creed or a set of beliefs as defined by one institution; rather, it includes the multiplicity of religious cultures of the period. We aim to show variations in late medieval and early modern versions of Christianity in different strata, in rural and urban cultures, and in trade and political cultures.

We wish to explore how religion worked as a medium between various levels of society, and this book will discuss dogma, theory and institutions as well. So, our focus is not solely 'from below': theological ideas and institutions were inherent elements in religion, and we do not deny the importance of elite teaching or political relations in the study of religion: quite the contrary, they were present in lived religion as integral background elements. However, we see the essence of religion as an active dynamic process; it created a performative space and gave meaning to people's experiences. Hence, religion was not solely defined by the clerical elite, nor was it a superstructure of culture bestowed from above that was deliberately, mundanely or even cynically used to achieve the goals of the elite. Lived religion is formed at the core of communal life, where ideas and religious concepts are experienced, and they are expressed by 'living them out' in everyday life, performance and ritual.

We hope to avoid the dichotomies between elite and popular and theological and mundane. Boundaries were fluid and did not always run according to accustomed lines. For example, allegations of some clergy being illiterate – i.e. not understanding Latin – are not unknown in the Middle Ages, while some laymen

were literate in both the medieval and modern sense. Clearly enough, there were differences in terms of learning and comprehending the basics of the faith according to one's social status and background, but in our view strict categorisation does not seem to add much to the understanding of the complexity and plurality of medieval and early modern religiosity, although admittedly they do offer tools for constructing neat narratives. Therefore, this book will shift back and forth between theology and church politics, religious teaching and lay life in a way that might be considered eclectic. The intention here is not to provide a systematic categorisation of who believed what, but rather to follow how ideas, events and people influenced other ideas, events and people. Lived religion in the lay context did not have the coherent and ordered structure of a learned dogma, nor was it mere outward ritual. Religion as a lived practice was a social process created by the participants' experiences, expressions, senses, emotions and performances. It meant 'living out' sometimes unexplainable concepts of the world and one's relations with the sacred and the supernatural.

The 'living out' of religion and faith was connected to theory and theology, but it was much more situated in people's own personal lives and the local and cultural communities. The living out of the concepts of faith, magic and superstition not only reflected but also created one's relationship with the sacred and supernatural powers, not to mention one's relationships with other people in the community. However, magic, too, requires faith in its effectiveness: it requires belief in there being a higher power that can be coerced into interaction. Relationships with the sacred and supernatural powers included amicable collaboration as well as the acting out of tensions and conflict. Psychologically, this means that one was more likely to describe one's own relationship with the sacred as faith – and to experience it as such as well: the same deeds would be considered faith or diligence and carefulness when performed oneself, but as ritual magic when performed by others. Magic, despite its alluring potential, seems to have been something which one would suspect others of. Moreover, superstition was always a label imposed from above. The complexity of the lived experience of the concepts prevents narrow definitions at the outset: indeed, the terms 'faith', 'magic' and 'superstition' will inevitably evolve throughout this study, and one of the aims of this book is to see how.

Religion was not merely spirituality either, even if it offered spiritual experiences for the participants. The performance of many religious rituals was private and individual while also partly public, communal and shared. In the surviving evidence, the aspect of publicity, communality and sharedness dominates – indeed, communality has been considered one of the key elements of traditional pre-modern religion. Orthopraxis – visible, public deeds, like confessing one's sins yearly and taking the communion; praying in a certain way; and performing pilgrimages, penitential practices and other rituals linked to the calendar and agricultural year with the rest of the community – was a method of ascertaining one's position within community. Instead of being hollow ceremonies or superficial forms, as some traditional criticism would have it, such acts were essential

elements of lived religion; they created experiences and emotions, enhanced the community's coherence and explained cosmological and social hierarchies. Religious practices were a means of interacting with one's community, and religion was an element of shared identity. The practices of lived religion could work both ways; they could enhance social cohesion but also lead to the disintegration of the community and social exclusion. Religion could break up communities by delineating the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.[4]

The dominance of communal practices in the source material may also reflect the fact that few lay people wrote down descriptions of their religious sentiments and experiences unless they had an audience in mind. Furthermore, some themes were unspeakable. A lack of faith – and through it, despair – was thought of as a sin that threatened both the individual and the whole community; it was a taboo and therefore unlikely to be discussed by the laity. Consequently, at least two parties had to be involved for any historical source material to be created. During the era of religious change discussed here, ideas of proper dogma and praxis were no longer understood as fixed and stable; rather, certainty was replaced by the experience of doubt and hesitation. We argue that negotiations on and between various social levels manifest the needs, aspirations and resistance behind religious change. The way people lived their religion was intricately linked with questions of the value of individual experience, communal cohesion and interaction, and power relations. Thus contextualised, the trials against people accused of heresy, witchcraft and superstitious practices can be treated as material on the religious life and sentiments of the wider culture. However, religious diversity and flexibility in accommodating different viewpoints and practices to the point of toleration seem essential in the religious atmosphere of the early modern era, which has nevertheless been termed the 'age of persecution'. Religion – as it was lived out in daily life and personal encounters with other people – was different from the dramatic disruptions of the witch hunts or the religio-political wars and massacres.[5]

One part of the interdependency of the religious and the social was the understanding of gender. Modern scholars have approached this interdependency in various ways. Gender historians have often treated gender as a social category that produces social hierarchies and relationships of power. This was highlighted in research focusing on medieval misogyny as reflected in clerical rhetoric, which for the major part dominated the first works on medieval or early modern women. Since women do not particularly stand out in many sorts of medieval source material, the first phase of research was dedicated to finding women in the sources. Negative stereotypes – in addition to saints and queens, women with actual political power – were most easily found; the early phases of the study of medieval women were dominated by the opposite poles of hierarchy, depicting a black and white image of medieval gender order.[6]

Understood as a component of hierarchies and power relationships, gender was also a tool in researching medieval and early modern workshop production and profit division, trade and production, and household order and human

reproduction. The first developers of medieval and early modern gender history theory were in fact economic historians. The questions that arose from this kind of understanding of gender concerned the exclusion of women from the labour market – especially skilled labour in the early modern period – and from the control of economic means of power, capital and the kind of labour that produced the control of resources. While women certainly worked in households, in care, and even in workshops, gender historians pointed out that their work did not give them power. Trends of explaining gender in the pre-modern at first emphasised either a deterioration of women's positions after the 'golden age' of the Late Middle Ages or a gradual embitterment of everything, gender included, with modernisation. Finally, the emphasis of gender historians, especially economic historians, settled on the notion Judith Bennett epitomises in her *History Matters*. She states that history shows a 'patriarchal equilibrium' where, despite many changes in women's experiences over the centuries, women's status vis-à-vis that of men has remained unchanged – they are and have always been inferior and oppressed. Bennett claims that traditional historians continuously reject such terms as 'women's oppression', 'gender order' and 'gender hierarchy', instead favouring other concepts emphasising difference instead of inequality; this hides from sight the ongoing and major feature of all historical and contemporary societies: men's domination over women.[7]

In this framework of hierarchical gender relationships, religion often is seen as a tool of oppression and a major force of history that holds back both societies and women, preventing freedom, activity and subjectivity. Modern feminism has therefore long advocated secularisation in the hope that it would, with modernisation and rationalisation, bring racial, gender or economic equality. Nevertheless, as Joan Scott says in *Secularism and Gender Equality*, the hope that secularisation would bring equality did not work particularly well for non-modern, non-western societies. This is becoming especially evident in globalisation and migration into western societies. In the west, too, secularisation failed to bring the hoped-for equality, whereas various religious and neo-religious movements have different kinds of feminist agendas. Especially for women who want to subscribe to a religion, a version of feminism that condemns religion may not be empowering.[8]

The need for a different kind of understanding of gender is especially visible if we look at pre-modern history or any kind of 'lived histories', histories that try to connect the messy stuff of individual people's action and agency to big pictures of societal structures, policies and ideologies.[9] Studies trying to link ideologies and structures to individual or shared experiences tend to disrupt the neat narratives, descriptions of development or categorisations of analysis. Such studies often show that the modernist stance – where not only the rights and status but also the subjective self of a person depends on free will – may not be the best way to assess gendered agency in connection to religions or faiths where the subjective self can come into being and exist only as subordinated to (a) greater power(s).[10]

Historians of medieval and early modern religion have found Judith Butler's understanding of gender as a performance more fruitful than defining gender as a categorical power relationship.[11] This approach allows for more culturally sensitive ways of dealing with gender also in contexts where human subjectivity was supposed to be always subjected to a higher power and where human power relationships were therefore by definition of less importance than those between humans and the Divine or transcendent. Therefore, God could be understood as a nurturing mother and monks as brides of Christ.[12] We follow this lead and understand femininities and masculinities as a way of being and doing, as a matrix or net of qualities where the men and women – also those living in close-knit hierarchal societies – can choose to construct identities. Our aim here is to speak of masculinities and femininities in the plural, allowing for not only gradation and a continuum but also varying scales and directions. For us, then, gender is a lived and experienced process, not a category into which one must fit. Such a gender is not only a tool for research or a category to produce answers, it is also an open question that historians must seek answers to, and ultimately, a result of research.[13]

It is evident from the ample research on medieval and early modern source material that people of the time did not understand gender merely as biological sex. On the contrary, gender was socially and culturally constructed in a matrix of other qualities, such as age, lineage, marital status, wealth, occupation and a number of other hierarchies in workshops, schools, cloisters, marketplaces, fields and cattle sheds. Gender consisted of expectations, roles, practices and possibilities, which people in turn used, re-created and reinterpreted. This book will provide examples of such manoeuvring in various situations and points in time, with different people acting as agents.

The medieval world had its own gender theory, which was largely based on the Bible and the writings of early Christian moralists. The key narratives in this respect were Genesis and the doctrine of the fall, which categorised the gender hierarchy and characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Adam was created first; he was more important, the more perfect image of God. Eve, on the other hand, was created second, which reflected her rank in the hierarchy. Just as important was the fall: since it was Eve who succumbed to the temptation of the Devil, she was deemed to be the weaker vessel with less willpower, rationality and virtue. She was the Devil's gateway and the reason for mankind's fall from grace.[14]

More importantly, this was no singular slip. Eve represented the whole of womankind, revealing its innermost qualities and faculties. Neo-platonic binaries associated men with rationality, logic and reason, and women with emotions, illogic and immorality. The basic hierarchy of genders and their categorisation was clear – except it was not. The Bible itself offers various sources for gender construction, showing it was fluid and inconsistent, and the later exegetical tradition added to the confusion, even creating contradictions. The Bible both affirms and contests gender hierarchy.[15] To begin with, there are actually two

different version of Genesis. The first one implies that man and woman were created simultaneously. The other, longer version tells how Eve was made out of Adam's rib. The position of Eve also caused widespread dispute: she was made second, but not from the foot, which would posit her clearly as inferior. She was not made from the head either, which would have made her superior. Indeed, did not the rib imply equality?

The fall was no easier to interpret. Yes, it was Eve who fell into temptation, but should not Adam, if he was indeed more rational and logical, have been stronger in resisting temptation? Could it have been that the sin of Eve was understandable, in a way? She was, after all, the weaker vessel that Adam was supposed to guard and govern. If so, the logical outcome of all this was that Adam's sin was graver.

Even the most misogynistic of moralists could not escape these dilemmas; the interpretation of Genesis and the fall was problematic and led to contradictory arguments. Sure enough, Eve was used as a prototype of Woman, a warning example in exempla, cautionary moral tales used in preaching to educate and entertain the audience. It was clear that every Christian was a potential sinner, and a considerable part of clerical rhetoric was targeted against the dangers of sin. Gendered stereotypes were a tool in this enculturation process. It has also been pointed out that exempla did not claim that all women were like this all the time; they merely showed what women were alike when they were sinful. A potentially more significant caveat is that gender was not the only hierarchy and power relation constructed by such tales. Recent works have shown that the misogynistic tales of women could have been a method to gain or claim control, acquire an elevated hierarchal position for the clergy, and recreate the proper order of society.[16] Misogyny could have been just a tool to utilise within other societal discussions. Clearly enough, handy rhetorical tools are not mere coincidences. Rather, they reveal wider cultural expectations and social customs.

Gender was a complex matter in theological ponderings: the inferior position of women was based on interrelated physiological, mental and spiritual matters. Female corporeality was not only an aspect of physiology or an individual feature; its interconnection with spiritual matters made it a shared concern. Women and especially their bodies were connected with lust: as an inheritance of early Christianity and the desert fathers, medieval Christianity nurtured the idea of carnal desires arising from the flesh. The urge to repudiate earthly pleasures and see sexuality as a threat to the salvation of one's soul was prominent among patristic writings, where renunciation of the flesh and praise of ascetic ideals were crucial. For early Christian authors, carnality was the main cause of sinfulness, and women were more tightly bound to corporeality.[17] However, medieval approaches to the body were neither simple nor straightforward, as has been reckoned by the numerous scholars working with the interconnection between gender, the body and religious practices. Especially in literary criticism, one may speak of a 'corporeal turn' because of the popularity and significance of this topic. These works have reassessed the dualism between mind and body. It has

been shown that bodies – and in the context of late medieval religiosity, female bodies in particular – were ample vessels for the practice of penitence, abstinence and asceticism. The body could be a positive element in religiosity, and it could be a means to both salvation and damnation.[18]

The body was not only biological but also a malleable cultural construct. Female bodily perfection was thought to be achieved via chastity. In addition to a distinct sexual orientation, chastity was a constructed state that needed recognition. It was not just a physical category, since physical virginity did not ensure virtue. Conduct was a crucial element in its construction, and spiritual chastity was more important than its bodily analogue. Virginity and chastity were not necessarily identical. This made chastity also a hierarchical construction; the church insisted on authority in recognising and confirming its crucial components.[19] To confuse things further, chastity was not a lack of desire but a way of redirecting it to matters of the spirit: the erotic could overlap with the spiritual, which had its clearest manifestation in the mystical marriage between the mystic and Christ.[20]

Chastity bound together corporeality and spirituality. Furthermore, these notions were manifested and created by affective elements. The production of emotions was an essential part of religiosity. The rhetoric of affectivity emerged first in the writings of the Cistercians in the 12th century and then spread to other orders and the laity, and it can be seen as an evident element in all literary genres from the 13th century onward. The use of emotions and affect was encouraged in devotional literature, contemplating Christ's passion and the Virgin Mary's grief at the loss of her son were constitutive.[21] An increased focus on religious emotiveness promoted a greater emphasis on praising typically feminine virtues, such as weakness, humility and weeping.[22] Since women were more carnal than men, their corporeality gave them easier access to identification with the suffering Christ. The misogynistic and patriarchal basis of culture that connected the feminine to weakness and emotion gave women the incentive and option to cultivate religion in a way that promoted their own way of practicing religion. The cultivation of affectivity turned the fabric of inferiorisation – misogynistic notions of women's uncontrollable emotionality – into practices of empowerment, shaping understanding of both gender and religion.

Chastity and affective elements were particularly pronounced elements in mysticism, but they were prevalent parts of later medieval culture and discussions of gender and religion in particular. These rhetorical constructions had implications in the lived practices of religion. Men, too, had to be humble and weak before God to be pious, while simultaneously all Christians needed to fight the feminine side of their nature, especially feeling of sexual lust.

Emotions and their production are shaped by the cultural and temporal context, for example by religious practices, and emotions, in turn, shape the communities, rituals and practices they are produced within. The word 'emotion' did not exist before the late Middle Ages, and the concept was understood differently from contemporary notion. Especially in the religious context, emotions were

comprehended as 'movements of the soul' leading to either salvation or damnation. In addition to the moral component, they included an important inner part.[23] We use emotion as an analytical category without an intention to advocate ahistorical human universals. For us, emotions are constituents of 'experience' since they were expressed, produced and observed collectively.

The gender theory of medieval and early modern Christianity and its applications within daily life were unstable, leading to multiple gender identities. In the early modern period, especially in northern Europe, gender expectations gained a new emphasis based on Luther's ideas of one's social duties and occupation as a religious calling. Crudely speaking, this meant that everyone had been placed by God Himself into an earthly occupation, the fulfilment of which was not only a social duty but also a duty towards God and the best method any individual could have to worship God. Luther's ideology here was related to the abolition of closed religious orders – the monasteries and cloisters, as well as beguine and similar lay religious organisations – but it also meant a renewal of the connection of the mundane and the religious in terms of gender expectations, along with everything else. Marriage was obviously an important social institution during the Middle Ages, but in Luther's formulations it became a calling. When they were not widows or servants or children, women were presented as housewives and mothers and men as husbands and fathers. However, both also belonged to the classes of parishioners, listeners to the word of God and – in certain situations, like in household devotions – groups of religious teachers.

Sometimes the social construction of gender – situation by situation, in the matrix of other qualities that defined expectations and opportunities – showed that gender was not tied to biological sex in any simple or unambiguous way. Sumptuary codes restricted clothing and appearance according to birth and occupation, sometimes also according to ethnic origin or religion, and cross-dressing was legally forbidden in many European countries. Nevertheless, stories of women presenting as men and men presenting as women were frequent enough to show that the idea was far from surprising to medieval and early modern communities. Religious vocabulary also abounds with descriptions of people experiencing a gender change or giving up their gender identity as a mode of ultimate religious experience, true union with Christ, and humbleness towards God and creation. Religious texts let us encounter men who feel like women, and women who have the hearts of men. This may lead one to question whether the long history of heteronormativity is really so long, as early modern and medieval people understood gender in less binary terms than we think they did. It also leads us to ask whether historians could conceptualise medieval and early modern gender in ways that better accommodate the questions that arise from our current society and the collision of new feminism, LGBT, and non-cis sexuality and gender with conservative ideologies, macho cultures and religions that are today labelled as 'traditional'. This book suggests that this need may lead to a concept of lived gender – gender that is performed but also structural – or perhaps a multitude of gender performances that create societal structures. This

kind of approach enables us to evaluate critically the modernist view of religion as deterring progress and independence, especially that of women. Pre-modern histories and 'lived religion' history, and perhaps 'lived histories' in general, suggest that to acquire a more accurate and sensitive understanding of the connection between religion and gender, gender needs to be approached as an open question rather than as a category.

Experience: from lived reality to analytical category

We approach 'experience' on three different levels. First, it is part of social reality, what happens to people; second, it is a cultural process to explain and to give meaning to what happens; and third, it is an analytical category to analyse the first two. For us, 'experience' is both a method as well as a result. We ask how experiences were constructed within and by religion and how they, in turn, contributed to the construction of a gender as lived practice.

Works on lived religion often describe their findings as lived experience or even religion as lived experience. This is meant to emphasise the practicality and pragmatic nature of lived religion: it consists of real people's experiences in real life, how things really were as opposed to how things were supposed to be or how they were hoped to be in prescriptive, legal, ideological or didactic materials. Nevertheless, 'experience' is not to be understood as a self-defining collection of anecdotal 'evidence', nor anything universal or a-historical. Rather, experience is, for us, a culturally and situationally bound social process.

Experience has been defined in various other disciplines, as well as in history. The definitions are slightly different, but they point to similar directions. Among philosophers, the definitions approach the concept from two directions at the same time. First, experience is understood as a subjective feeling or understanding of the world or the events in the world, guided to an extent by real facts and events but also, and to an even greater extent, by subjective prejudice and expectation. At the same time, experience is the process of encountering the world that is intersubjectively shared by oneself and other people, and a test of one's subjective understanding against the shared concepts.[24] In the current post-truth or post-factual culture, this type of understanding of the world is often evoked as a kind of alternative evidence: it matters not whether it was 'actually' or factually true, people's experience of the success of a president or an encounter with social workers is seen as valid regardless. The unclear relation between experience and subjectivity – or indeed, experience, fact and fiction – is made explicit when the concept is used in literature studies and the study of different art forms that explicitly work on fiction and even speech communication – fields that are interested in how the art work or speech act can make the audience 'feel' or 'experience' something.[25]

In historical study, the focus is less clearly on the purposeful performance of communication: a vast number of factors in the material or social world can trigger experiences. Therefore experience is less self-evidently fictional, and it may be easy to forget that it is still interpretative. Experience may reflect physical and

social or cultural realities in the lives of those who experience, but it also reflects the ways people make sense and explain those realities to themselves and to others. The explanations and interpretations given will not only influence each other and the ways people make sense of what has happened to them but also guide what people expect to happen to them in the future. These expectations, in turn, may guide people's behaviour and expectations, and thereby experiences also have an effect on what actually happens to individuals and groups of people. Moreover, new experiences will add to the framework in which people explain their pasts: therefore, their explanations will evolve and experiences will keep adjusting, too. Historians – who generally try to avoid overly restrictive definitions – might describe experience as mental experimentation with and observation of the world that always includes an attempt to explain and interpret the observations made. As such, experience is an ongoing social, contextual and situationalised process.

As pointed out by Joan Scott during the linguistic turn,[26] if experience is allowed to remain anecdotal, it really is just a collection of random examples, and it provides no more evidence or argument of the real past than general 'whataboutism'. A similar critique was presented by Gareth Stedman Jones regarding the early modern period, especially pointing out, for example, that though one of the early modern meanings for (religious) experience given by the Oxford English dictionary was conversion, the Reformations in England and Sweden are poorly explained with any reference to the conversion experiences of Henry VIII of England and Gustav Vasa of Sweden.[27] Both Scott's and Jones' critiques highlight the need to ask what experiences are we talking about exactly. To be useful, experience needs to be conceptualised analytically.[28] As such, experience is understood to be something more than just a singular occurrence in an individual's life; it is something shared, and it encompasses emotions and corporeal and sensory elements and memories. An experience is something meaningful, and this process of giving meaning is the focal point. The authentic experiences of illiterate lay people of the medieval or early modern era can, at best, be accessible only in mediated form. Indeed, 'experience' is not necessarily something that actually happened to a certain individual at a certain point in time; it can also be something evoked, provoked or imagined, providing a bridge between structures, ideology and individual and communal agency.

The above understanding of experience as a social mechanism is modern, and made to serve a modern historian, but it is not whole foreign to the medieval and early modern not objects of our study. The Oxford English Dictionary defines experience as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, the meanings of the word start from the later Middle Ages: an experience can mean *an event, the action of putting to the test (1393); a procedure or operation performed in order to ascertain or illustrate some truth, an experiment (1384, now obsolete), Proof by trial and practical demonstration (1393, now obsolete), Observation of facts or events (1377), A state or condition viewed subjectively, What has been experienced (1607), Knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone (1553).* As a verb, the meanings are slightly younger: **to experience** means *to make trial or experiment of, to put to the test*

(1541); to ascertain or prove by experiment or observation (1541); To have experience of, to feel, suffer, undergo (1588); To learn by experience (1586).

Two things are apparent in the definitions, as well as also in the corresponding German concept of *Ehrfarung* (vs *Erlebnis*): the first is the active and purposeful nature of the term, and the second is its process-like nature. Experience is not just something that exists or that one is given, it needs to be got and gained, produced even. As experience is produced, the observation of the world through one's senses – and the interpretation of that world through understanding and previous knowledge – also shapes one's expectations of the future. As these observations and interpretations are tested and shared with others through inter-subjective communication, it is also possible – and, we believe, advisable – to pay attention to and analyse how they are produced, shared, controlled, appropriated, approved of or discarded. After all, they shape how people understand the world in which they – and we – live. While experience is based on both observation and interpretation, and while always communicated between humans, it is created not merely in language; it is an essential part of social reality.[29]

Experience is not only an object of study, however. It is also an approach and a method. As Barbara Rosenwein once noted about 'emotional communities' these same communities could also be a lot of other things: families, groups of friends, certain political circles or something else, it was only the historians' interest in emotion which turned them into emotional communities.[30] In our understanding of experience, the same is true, and not merely about communities, but the rest of history as well. Experience is an approach that guides what we think is interesting, and also in how we see it. For us, experience gives a holistic and intersectional approach to the past: as a process and something that is done by people instead of given to them completed. Logically, it follows that experience cannot be looked at only as a top-down process, nor a from–below-type of social history: experience is a way to draw attention to the in-between communication, negotiation and transmitting of physical realities and interpretations thereof. Since it looks at both ideals and realities, communication and thought, it is also by definition a trans- or multidisciplinary way of doing history.

Methodologically, we hope that the nature of experience as a social process will give us a way to connect the micro and macro levels in historical observation, investigation and explanation, and bridge the gap between empirics or source material and theory or explanation and generalisation. In the following, we will concentrate on what people do, to get at how they think and experience things that they do not talk about. Since experience is action as well as an analytical category, it can be used to study the forms of action and interaction that eventually create both individual self and the community. But as a contextual and situational phenomenon and approach, experience must always be a genuinely open question throughout time and space. This is what we hope to bring out with a longue durée discussion crossing the traditional boundary between medieval and early modern, and by taking a variety of geographical locations with different cultural and social preferences in each point of time.
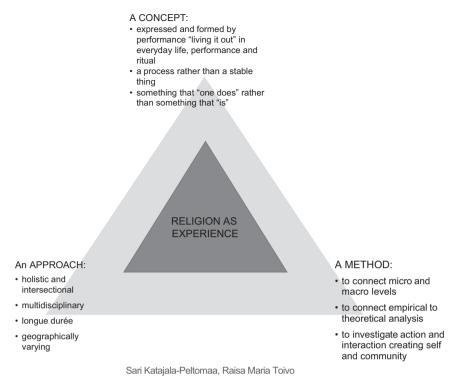
A CONCEPT:
• expressed and formed by performance "living it out" in everyday life, performance and ritual
• a process rather than a stable thing
• something that "one does" rather than something that "is"

RELIGION AS EXPERIENCE

An APPROACH:
• holistic and intersectional
• multidisciplinary
• longue durée
• geographically varying

A METHOD:
• to connect micro and macro levels
• to connect empirical to theoretical analysis
• to investigate action and interaction creating self and community

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Raisa Maria Toivo

FIGURE 0.1   Religion as experience

Source: © Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Raisa Maria Toivo

Medieval and early modern Europe

The purpose of this volume is to investigate the religious and gendered experiences of lay people from the late medieval period to the early modern era – that is, across the traditional period boundaries of the Renaissance and the Reformation. We look for change in time, but even more so, we end up showing continuities across the divide between the periods. Indeed, one of the results of this book is that we end up showing that things lived and experienced are at the same time more flexible to adaptation and slower to profound change than any of the written analyses of these changes – either by contemporaries or by later sociologists or historians – are apt to show. The lived and experienced are at the same time rooted in the momentary, contingent and changing situation, and in the basics of life, society and survival. They change radically only when the living conditions of people change equally radically. New kinds of wealth, innovation and disease entered the European universe at the break between the medieval and the early modern. However, most of the basic modes of life nevertheless remained the same in the agricultural milieu and even in the mostly small towns' inherently rural conditions.

The Renaissance and the Reformation are among the crucial thresholds of the shift from the medieval to the early modern. The Reformation has been described both as an abrupt break that revolutionised (or ought to have revolutionised) thinking and religion in a very short time and as a long process over the centuries with phases of turmoil and crisis as well as gradual adaptation over time. The longer version has been termed the 'Long Reformation'. The critical tone towards what the Protestant Reformers would later label the failures of the papacy had become increasingly apparent in the areas of lay and regular piety and theology, and it manifested as a slowly forming nationalist critique of the papacy from the late 14th century onwards. The Avignon papacy and the following schism can be seen as low points for the Church hierarchy, but disapproving voices against the practices of Renaissance popes grew in volume during the 15th and 16th centuries. The need for modifications was also acknowledged within the Church, and attempts to achieve conciliar reforms in religious practice and theology were made throughout the history of the Church.[31] Likewise, the religious changes continued, were reversed and acquired yet new directions in various locations across Europe for at least a century or more after the 'Wittenberg affair'. Other scholars have emphasised the different phases of the crises (rather than the phases of gradual adaptation and establishment) as constitutive of the changes, by discussing Reformations – Lutheran, Calvinist, English, Swedish, Counter-Reformation, Tridentine, people's and princes' – in the plural.[32]

We will be using both of these terminologies and both of the related emphases on where in society and culture, religious and cultural change took place. We acknowledge times of upheaval, but a large part of this book will showcase the importance of the ordinary and expected everyday in shaping, interpreting and establishing change. The everyday is when people have the time and means to create ritual and reinterpret it. The everyday is when some experiences of crises are either forgotten or institutionalised into new social orders. Crises may destroy societies, but in the everyday, societies rebuild themselves and choose new directions.

All of the above obviously affected gender order and the comprehension of masculinities and femininities, but the changes were not simple or straightforward. The interconnection of societal change and gender order has been a crucial question at least since 1977, when Joan Kelly published her seminal work 'Did women have a Renaissance?' Tellingly, the article was published in a compilation titled *Becoming visible*, as this was the era when women were emerging – becoming visible – in both society and academic research. Kelly's main argument was that societal changes affect different people in different ways. We, too, focus on temporal changes, but we do not propose a simple evolution. Societal and cultural changes at the end of Middle Ages had an effect on various levels of society and various groups based on wealth, ethnicity and gender, but they were not straightforward, simple or simultaneous. Since Kelly's article, however, not only have women become visible, so too have various forms of gender and sexual

identity, the understanding of non-cis and non-binary gender, and LGBT rights. This has, however, not removed the need for this kind of research – quite the contrary. Now it is clear that we need a sharper lens to focus our view on these issues.

One of our methods of achieving this is the careful contextualisation and understanding of geographical and cultural nuances rather than the construction of one universalising discourse of gender and its temporal changes. Geographically, the book covers western Europe from Italy to the Nordic countries. A large part of the material we use is from Italy, England, Finland and Scandinavia, but various cases come from other areas in Europe. As this volume also covers the northern areas of Europe, it will offer some insights and viewpoints that are different from the usual canon of either late medieval or early modern European history, which concentrates on British, German and French areas or the Mediterranean. Especially during the Middle Ages, teaching and dogma created a universalising discourse, but the wide geographical setting enables us to see the nuances and fractures within it. On the other hand, the emerging nation states often form the confines of research, sometimes too rigidly and even anachronistically.

Comparative perspectives and cross-cultural analysis offer us the tools to scrutinise these boundaries, including in terms of if and how they had an effect on the concepts of feminine and masculine. Simultaneously, we acknowledge that histories of gender and religion in Europe were entangled with the histories of the rest of the world, as well as non-Christian faiths and religions within and outside Europe. Nevertheless, the reader should not expect this volume to provide an overview of everything even in European history, or even an equal amount of detail or generalisation for every European area. A detailed country-to-country overview is neither the purpose nor a possibility here. This book is not meant to be a conclusive 'History of the Reformation of Gender in Different Parts of Europe'. We will merely point to comparisons, contrasting notions and similarities in an attempt to gain a wider comprehension of how understandings of religion and gender interacted in the situated and contextualised changes of the everyday.

The structure of the book

The book has a two-fold strategy: we develop the concept of lived religion from the viewpoint of experiencing religion on various levels, from the institution of the church, control and dogma to daily life, work and family. Secondly, we combine our conceptual work on religion as lived practice into developing an understanding of gender in the intersectional context of religious experience.

The book combines conceptual development with empirical history. We use significant case studies – at least one medieval and one early modern in each chapter – and tell the stories of individual persons and groups of people, which we hope will make the book interesting and easy to read. However, we use them to make a point and to develop the concepts of lived religion and gender, and to compare the medieval and the early modern. Lived religion is explored via

MAP 0.1 Locations of the major cases analysed in *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*

Source: © Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Raisa Maria Toivo

various themes, such as the Reformations, power, agency, gender, work, family, miracles and witchcraft. The book is divided into three main chapters, which discuss the interplay of gender and lived religion in different spheres of life, and a conclusion. Each chapter connects the source materials used for the historiography and conceptualisation of lived religion and lived gender.

Chapter 1 asks how religion and gender were performed and experienced in the home, household and family. Marriage was the basic unit of society in religious, legal and social theories as well as in the experiences of daily life. Being a wife and mother or a husband and father were roles society expected of its members – even during the celibacy-admiring Middle Ages. Parenting and taking care of one's household and dependants were religiously prescribed positions

and moral responsibilities. Correspondingly, a major part of religious participation took place within homes and among family members and kin. Religion as a lived practice influenced the milestones in a person's life course, gendered parental roles and the socialisation of children, respectively; performing these duties formed the nucleus of lived religion. Familial and religious responsibilities, options and choices were amalgamated.

At home, women were often regarded simply as wives and mothers and men as husbands and fathers. This view is justified because most laypeople did indeed marry, and the marriage bed and marital relationship with its joys, sorrows and duties therefore largely defined ordinary people's lives. The source material clearly demonstrates the significance of marriage, especially for women. Court records, for example, typically defined women through men, either as the wives of their husbands or, in case of unmarried women, the daughters of their fathers. From a legal perspective, it was important to know under which man's guardianship and guidance a woman belonged.[33] Legal and religious theories supported this view, and a similar categorisation was utilised by the clergy during the Middle Ages. It emphasised the moral value of women according to their marital status, but such a classification was also a value-laden political act.[34]

The chapter discusses family roles, parenthood and spousal relationships within the religious or devotional context. We do this by using case studies, especially the miracle story of the drowning and recovery of the five-year-old Johanna because of her parents' devotion to Thomas Cantilupe, and the story of Maria from Ulvila and her son-in-law, who accused each other of witchcraft as they fought for years over the control of a household, farmstead and family. The chapter uses original material from medieval and early modern canonisation processes and secular court records.

Chapter 2 asks how religion and gender were performed in the public sphere, and how those performances interacted. Not only was it ideologically inappropriate for women to have public power, it was also ideologically inappropriate for women to spend time in a public space. Religious teachings highlighted that in their own homes and under the control of their husbands, fathers, or other men of the family, women were safe from dangerous temptations. Space therefore held a moral dimension: virtuous women stayed at home.[35] Dividing space into the masculine public space and the feminine private space was not a mere myth created by moralists; everyday tasks and duties tied women to their homes more closely than they did men. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think that women were entirely absent from the streets and marketplaces of medieval or early modern towns and villages: just like men, women also had to take care of their chores and responsibilities, taking them outside the home sphere. In addition to leaving home for everyday jobs, women also attended church, went to the marketplace, appeared in court, visited relatives and embarked on pilgrimages.

The chapter discusses women's and men's public religious devotion and public speech, as well as the interplay between religion and work outside the home or in business. It uses various case studies, including a story of interactions between

two widows – one living as a secluded noble lady and the other continuing her late husbands' shop – and case of Hans Smek, a knight of the Swedish king who was taught the earthly and heavenly hierarchies by Saint Birgitta and demons. The chapter investigates the ways religion, politics and the economy were inter-related: women could, for example, make political statements by their pilgrim-ages. Like Chapter 1, this chapter uses original material from medieval and early modern canonisation processes and secular court records.

Chapter 3 discusses how gender and religion were performed in the overtly religious sphere. What roles did women and men play in the church? In medieval and early modern ideologies, lay people in general belonged to the home and the economy, not to guiding the spiritual, despite the Reformation rhetoric of the priesthood of all believers. This was even more clear in the case of women. Both secular and ecclesiastical texts emphasise that women were committed to the home and that women's chores and duties took place in the private space. Accord-ing to the canon law, for example, women were not allowed to teach, rule or tes-tify in public. The latter restraint was laid down in Gratian's *Decretum* (circa 1140), although it presumably only applied to criminal cases.[36] Nevertheless, it was never the whole picture even in ideological or didactic teaching: husbands, masters and housewives were always expected to provide spiritual guidance within their homes, and in practice most of the religious rituals that marked parish life both before and after the Reformations were performed by lay men and women.

How was devotion made to suit feminine or masculine roles or identities? We discuss the roles that Mary, Joseph and a range of saints were given in the medieval era and the Long Reformation Catholicism and Protestantisms. We also consider how these roles were used and imitated by lay devotees. This chapter returns to questions of power, motherhood and sexuality through narratives of heresy, demonic possession and witchcraft trials, including stories of women having cop-ulated or made a pact with the Devil. The chapter uses original material from medieval exempla, canonisation processes and early modern secular court records.

Finally, the Conclusion returns to the questions posed in the introduction: how can this performance be conceptualised as a lived experience of gender and religion? Most importantly, how does such a conceptualisation change the histori-cal investigation of either religion or gender? Our longue durée analysis will also deconstruct and challenge the traditional periodisation used in history research.

Churches as institutions, theology and philosophy are present in the back-ground, but they are not the explicit focus of research in this book. We are inter-ested in uncovering how the micro and macro levels were interconnected, how individual experiences and daily life contributed to and were shaped by dogma and societal factors. We use the conventional English names of rulers and other well-known individuals, while the original version found in the source material is used for persons otherwise unknown. All translations from the original sources were made by the authors.

Notes

1 Arnold, 'Histories and Historiographies', pp. 23–41; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, 'Religion as Experience'.
2 Delumeau, 'Le prescript en la religion vécue', pp. 177–211.
3 Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*; Ammerman, 'Lived Religion'; Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Moore, *Touchdown Jesus*.
4 Katajala-Peltomaa and Vuolanto, 'Religious Practices and Social Interaction', pp. 11–24; Marinković and Vedriš, *Identity and Alterity in Hagiography*.
5 See e.g. Dixon, Freist, and Greengrass, *Living with Religious Diversity*; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*.
6 See e.g. Klapisch-Zuber, *A History of the Women in the West*.
7 Bennet, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*.
8 Scott, 'Secularism and Gender Equality'.
9 Ågren, *Making a Living, Making a Difference*.
10 See e.g. works on Islamic women's subjectivity by Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Gökariksel, 'Beyond the Officially Sacred' or Mack, 'Religion, Feminism and the Problem of Agency'.
11 Bynum, 'Holy Feast and Holy Fast'; Heal, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*.
12 Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', pp. 182–209 for Cistercian monks depicting themselves with feminine images, and also their soul as Christ's bride.
13 Boydston, 'Gender as a Question'. See also Joan Scott arguing that gender is only useful as a question (not necessarily a category) in the 2008 American History Review.
14 Dalarun, 'The Clerical Gaze'.
15 Tinkle, *Gender and Power*.
16 Stephens, *Demon Lovers*; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*.
17 On Jerome's and Origen's comments, see Tinkle, *Gender and Power in Medieval Exegesis*, p. 23; Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 174, 188, and 376.
18 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, and Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*. See also her *Christian Materiality*, pp. 31–33 for a caveat against taking the body as a synonym for a person or individual. See Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, pp. 23–37 for a critique of the idea that patristic and medieval authors had a dualistic model of the body as a psychosomatic unity and potential site for redemption, and of the flesh as the sinful body encompassing carnal desires. See also de Groot and Morgan, 'Introduction: Beyond the "Religious Turn"?', pp. 1–29. For fruitful theorising, see also Ahmed, 'Some Preliminary Remarks' and Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.
19 Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp. 3–7; see also Evans, Salih, and Bernau, *Medieval Virginities*; Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence', pp. 102–118; Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt', pp. 52–67.
20 Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt' and Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, pp. 56–57.
21 Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; McNamer, *Affective Meditation*; Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters*, and Bryan, *Looking Inward*.
22 Tinkle, *Gender and Power*, p. 79. See also Corbari, *Vernacular Theology*, pp. 164–165.
23 Bouquet and Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Âge*.
24 Backman, 'Äärellisyyden kohtaaminen', pp. 26–27.
25 Toikkanen, 'Välineen käsite'; Toikkanen and Virtanen, 'Kokemuksen käsitteen ja käytön jäljillä', pp. 7–24.
26 Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience'.
27 Jones, 'Un autre histoire social'; Carr, *Experience and History*; Lepedit, *Forms de l'experience*.
28 Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*.
29 Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience'; Jay, *Songs of Experience*; Lepedit, *Les forms de l'experience*; on the anthropology of experience, all articles in Turner and Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*.

30 Rosenwein, 'Worrying', p. 842. Rosenwein's concepts have been criticised for their imprecision, but we use the imprecision here with purpose: the experiencing community is only an example of the spheres where experience is a magnet to the compass guiding the historian rather than a thing on its own. see e.g. Plamper, 'The History of Emotions,' pp. 237–265.
31 Tyacke, *England's Long Reformation* and Wallace, *The Long European Reformation*. See also e.g. Spurr, *The Post Reformation*. On conciliarist ideas in the 14th century, see Oakley, *The Mortage of the Past*, pp. 209–219. On later developments, see Oakley, *The Watershed of Modern Politics*. Also Mullet, *The Catholic Reformation*, pp. 1–28; Bolton, *The Medieval Reformation*. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*. On religious dissent in the Reformation era, see Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*.
32 E.g. Haigh, *English Reformations* or Ryrie, *The European Reformations*.
33 Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*, p. 40.
34 Partly because of this kind of classification of women, the categorisation of 'single women' was particularly perplexing for the elite. Cordelia, *Medieval Single Women*.
35 For moral teachings about space and gender, see e.g. Casagrande, 'The Protected Woman', p. 85, and Hanawalt, *'Of Good and Ill Repute'*, pp. 20–26.
36 For women as witnesses, see e.g. Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht*, pp. 65–66.

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