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# Pecock's Mismigrations across the Religious Field

## *The Dynamics and Boundaries of the Failure of a Reforming Bishop and His Texts in Mid-fifteenth-century England*

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### Abstract

In mid-fifteenth-century England, the anti-Lollard Bishop of Chichester Reginald Pecock managed to get himself convicted for heresy in the very act of trying to teach orthodox doctrine to the laity. His remarkable array of interlocking treatises recodified the entirety of Christian doctrine and catechetics in a sprawling multitextual *summa* that endeavoured to forge its own new communities of interpretation. Pecock's textual mismigrations reveal much about the perils of social change and stasis that they attempt to address through the intent to reform. Although the laity of this time was successful in procuring more challenging devotional and theological materials, Pecock's bid to bestow on them a newly enhanced theological and philosophical role was a step too far. So what can be extrapolated from his failure? What do his frustrated texts tell us about the dynamics, permeability, and (non-)negotiability of religious boundaries in mid-fifteenth-century England?

### Keywords

Reginald Pecock – Lollardy – orthodoxy – reason – Scripture – heresy – reform – laity – clergy – change – vernacular – theology

In England, the mid-1400s saw one particularly spectacular and ultimately disastrous attempt to renegotiate the boundaries between clergy and laity. This bid did not come from lay dissenters, but from a reforming prelate, Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, who endeavoured, in a sprawling programme of 30 or so interlinked treatises and manuals in the native tongue, to critique and to reformat the entirety of Christian doctrine and catechetics according to

his own system of seven “matters” and four “tables.” In this mighty enterprise, individual texts, calibrated at different levels of difficulty, were coordinated and customized to cater for all Christians in England, whatever their social or educational capabilities. A particular aim of the venture for Pecock was to out-argue and win back Lollards for the Church by their own free will and consent, rather than extracting from them a show of obedience by the force of law and the threat of dire punishment.

Pecock sincerely believed that, as a bishop, he was working on behalf of mainstream orthodoxy in upholding and enhancing the authority of the church. Woefully, however, his ambitions were entirely thwarted and turned to personal catastrophe. To put it in the language of Bourdieusian fields, he encountered major problems in being caught between confusable zones of differentiation, not least because he himself played dangerously with boundaries and religio-political capital in trying overtly, as a one-man movement, to shift lay habitus and to reconfigure fields after his own inimitable fashion. As is evident from the editors’ introduction to this thematic section, it is a key aim of this section and its essays to provide “original case studies which can illustrate several important dynamics of lay religious culture during our period. But they also explore the usability and limits of the theoretical framework of the religious field” (see xxx–xxx above). The present article therefore combines a case study with terms and concepts from the religious field that may be propitious for communicating with non-specialists. It accordingly has recourse to key ideas and metaphors of field theory, and coordinates the analysis and the findings of the case study with such terms and concepts.

It certainly did not help Pecock that he was seen as being on the wrong side at the wrong time during the War of the Roses. More particularly, it was by his own misjudgement that he was caught up in a tangle of the religious and the political. This misjudgement occurred in 1447, when he outraged both his fellow bishops and leading figures in the laity with a sermon declaring that the episcopate was not obliged to preach. Bishops, so he declared, had duties more important than preaching to occupy their energies and time. (Pecock, ironically enough, was a committed preacher.) Moreover, a letter of his to the Mayor of London offended its recipient so grievously that he complained to Henry VI about Pecock’s violations of doctrine. To make matters worse, Viscount Beaumont, a powerful nobleman at the heart of the establishment, set about putting legal process in train for Pecock’s prosecution. The Bishop of Chichester ended up being tried for heresy on a series of mainly trumped-up charges, including one of writing to the laity on matters of theology in the vernacular. In 1457 copies of his works were publicly incinerated in London before a vast crowd. Pecock escaped burning by publicly recanting the transgressions of which he

was convicted. He was subsequently deprived of his bishopric and imprisoned in the East Anglian Abbey of Thorney, where he was allowed no scholarly books and no means of writing. Inside two or three years he was dead.<sup>1</sup>

This sorry tale of the Bishop of Chichester is a tale of religious and political fields and of one particular Pecock's inability to migrate across them. The logistics of his failure reveal much about the ways in which these fields worked in the mid-fifteenth century in England. Also revealing, however, are Pecock's own words, his surviving texts: it is on these that this case study concentrates. Fine work has been accomplished on the historical contexts of Pecock. Much, however, still remains to be disclosed by examining his writings, even though considerable valuable research has been published on them.<sup>2</sup> In his works,

- 1 For an informative biography of Pecock covering the details of his life mentioned here and much else, see Wendy Scase, *Reginald Pecock* [Authors of the Middle Ages 8] (Aldershot, 1996). For general studies on Pecock, see V.H.H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock. A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1945); Kirsty Campbell, *The Call to Read. Reginald Pecock's Books and Textual Communities* (Notre Dame, 2010), and Charles W. Brockwell Jr., *Bishop Reginald Pecock and the Lancastrian Church. Securing the Foundations of Cultural Authority* [Texts and Studies in Religion 25] (Lewiston, NY, 1985). For developments in the fifteenth-century English Church as a context for the religious literary culture of the time, see Vincent Gillespie, "Chichele's Church. Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel," in *After Arundel. Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh [Medieval Church Studies 21] (Turnhout, 2011), 3–42. For the broader context of Lollardy, see Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation. Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988). For a useful reconsideration of the problematics of religious change at this time, see Alexandra Walsham, "Migrations of the Holy. Explaining Religious Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44.2 (2014), 241–280. See also, however, Elisabeth Salter's critique of Walsham's approach in her essay in this thematic section.
- 2 One can draw attention to a number of valuable publications on Pecock. For a study of Pecock's scholastic methodological self-consciousness, see Mishtooni Bose, "Two Phases of Scholastic Self-Consciousness. Reflections on Method in Aquinas and Pecock," in *Aquinas as Authority*, ed. Paul Van Geest, Harm Goris, and Carlo Leget (Leuven, 2002), 187–201. This essay understands how Pecock translated syllogistic scholastic method into his programme in order to empower laypeople with a degree of autonomy (albeit clerically supervised) in the religious field. For discussion of how Pecock used a vernacular voice for the stewardship of theology and doctrine on the heterodox/orthodox and religio-political boundaries, see Mishtooni Bose, "Reginald Pecock's Vernacular Voice," in *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England*, ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill Havens, and Derrick Pitard (Woodbridge, 2003), 217–236. For Pecock's educative intervention in bidding to teach the laity a field-shifting yet orthodox programme of rational visual and textual literacies, see Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text, and Reform in Fifteenth Century England* [Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 81] (Cambridge, 2010), chapter 5, "Reginald Pecock's *libri laicorum*," 155–188, 222–228. For an interesting analysis of how Pecock, with a sharp awareness of the political boundaries of his times, attempted to

Pecock's self-fashioning of his status and of his role as an ecclesiastical specialist, together with his attempts to redefine and upgrade the role and the capacities in religious culture of the laity in an attempt to defend and invigorate the institution of the church and of mainstream devotional culture, sheds fascinating light on the historical situation and also on what might have been but never came to pass. In the case of Pecock, then, the religious and political fields are marked with his tell-tale failure, and not least with his own tell-tale texts.<sup>3</sup>

One thing that unnerved his contemporaries was that Pecock prioritized reason over every other form of authority, including the Bible. As a good scholastic, he took the perfectly respectable position that God never did anything against reason. The Bible, although it may reveal divine truths beyond human ken and beyond human reason, undeviatingly accorded with reason and never violated it. Indeed, for Pecock, it is this principle of reason that characterizes the theological fact of humanity being made in the image of God. Reason, not Scripture, is ground of truth, philosophy, and ethics:

Scripture is not ground to eny oon such seid vertu, gouernaunce, deede, or trouthe, ... but oonli doom of natural resoun, which is moral lawe of

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shift the discourse of the classification of sciences in harmony with his reworking of catechetical instructions, see Tamás Karáth, "Vernacular Authority and the Rhetoric of Sciences in Pecock's *The Folewer to the Donet* and in *The Court of Sapience*," in *After Arundel. Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh [Medieval Church Studies 21] (Turnhout, 2011), 285–303. For further work on Pecock, see R.M. Ball, "The Opponents of Bishop Pecock," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48.2 (1997), 230–262; Ian Johnson, "Loose Giblets. Encyclopaedic Sensibilities of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* in Later Medieval English Literary Culture and the Sad Case of Reginald Pecock," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge, 2013), 325–342; Stephen E. Lahey, "Reginald Pecock on the Authority of Reason, Scripture and Tradition," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56.2 (2005), 235–260; Kantik Ghosh, "Bishop Reginald Pecock and the Idea of 'Lollardy,'" in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale. Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson*, ed. Helen Barr and Ann M. Hutchinson (Turnhout, 2005), 251–265.

- 3 Pecock's extant works comprise *The Donet by Reginald Pecock, D.D., Bishop of St. Asaph and Chichester, Now First edited from ms. Bodl. 916 and collated with The Poore Mennis Myrroure (British Museum, Addl. 37788)*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock [Early English Text Society o.s. 156] (London, 1921 [for 1918]); *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy by Reginald Pecock, D.D., Sometime Lord Bishop of Chichester*, ed. C. Babington, 2 vols. [Rolls Series 19.1–2] (London, 1860); *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. W.C. Greet [Early English Text Society o.s. 171] (London, 1927 [for 1926]); *Reginald Pecock's Book of Faith*, ed. J.L. Morison (Glasgow, 1909); and *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock [Early English Text Society o.s. 164] (London, 1924 [for 1923]). For *The Poore Mennis Myrroure* see Hitchcock's edition of the *Donet*, 223–230.

kinde and moral lawe of God, writun in the book of lawe of kinde in menis soulis, prentid into the ymage of God, is ground to ech such vertu, gouernaunce, deede, and trouthe.<sup>4</sup>

Scripture is not grounds for any one such said virtue, governance, deed, or truth, ... but only the judgement of reason, which is the moral law of nature and the moral law of God, written in the book of the law of nature in men's souls, imprinted with the image of God, is the grounds for each such virtue, governance, deed, and truth.

In classic Bourdieusian terms, in which power does not go naked but routinely disguises itself as what is natural, the ostensibly natural law of reason overgoes Holy Scripture itself. The danger, however, from the point of view of the establishment, was that Pecock's risky and potentially subversive assertion of such natural power as a potent discursive and moral agency in every lay soul threatened the authority of the Church. By his token of reason divinely instilled in all people, Pecock goes so far as to valorize intelligent layfolk as potential middlebrow theologians and philosophers. Given the complex and fine-grained intellectual challenges met by the laity active in fields such as law and commerce, many of them, for Pecock, were well capable of understanding the complex terms and concepts of theological discourse. In his *Repressor of Over-Much Blaming of the Clergy*, Pecock accordingly articulates some of his most important theological arguments through justifications and expositions relying on his appreciation of the occupational and social behaviours of his intended lay audience.<sup>5</sup> He sought to turn them into rudimentary vernacular theologians and philosophers by, amongst other educative means, using urban similes of, for example, carting, butchery, goldsmithing, and cutlercraft. These serviced his argument about the relationship between Scripture and reason, whilst at the same time translating an occupationally customized version of theological and philosophical understanding and practice into the vernacular lay domain.

4 Pecock, *Repressor* (see above, n. 3), 18. The modern English translations after each Middle English quotation are mine.

5 *Ibid.*, 21. For further discussion of Pecock's recourse to syllogisms drawing on occupation and social custom, see Ian Johnson, "The 'Goostly Chaffare' of Reginald Pecock: Everyday Craft, Commerce, and Custom Meet Syllogistic Polemic in Fifteenth-Century London," in *Religious Practices and Everyday Life in the Long Fifteenth Century. Interpreting Change and Continuity in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ian Johnson and Ana Maria Rodrigues [New Communities of Interpretation] (Turnhout, in preparation).

Pecock clearly thinks that he can risk such a boundary shift when, in the style of the scholastic syllogism, he addresses the complex problematics of how to distinguish “philosophie and the faculte of pure dyvynite” from “Holi Scripture” by locating his take on the relationship between reason and Scripture in a safe and stable area of mainstream pious middle-class commercial culture. Moral philosophy and theology, on the one hand, and the Bible, on the other, are, in this syllogism, as separate from each other as are masonry and carpentry, for it would be folly to maintain that anything in masonry is grounded in carpentry:

so it is that the faculte of the seid moral philosophie and the faculte of pure dyvynite or the Holi Scripture ben ij. dyuerse facultees, ...; lijk as he schulde vnresonabili and reprouabili aske, if he askid of a treuthe in masonry, where it is groundid in carpentrie; and wolde not ellis trowe it be trewe but if it were groundid in carpentrie.<sup>6</sup>

so it is that the faculty of the said moral philosophy and the faculty of pure divinity or Holy Scripture are two diverse faculties, ...; as if he should unreasonably and reprovably/blameworthyly ask, if asking of a truth of masonry, where it is grounded in carpentry, and would not otherwise believe it to be true unless it were grounded in carpentry.

Scholastic terms such as “treuthe” and “groundid” (a favourite Lollard term for asserting that an argument is founded in Holy Writ) are transferred strategically to crafts—a way of blurring distinctions between them and theology and thereby appealing to the professional understanding and pride of the artisans to whom he is appealing doctrinally and polemically. This implicit brokerage between lay expertise and clerical learning (with Pecock as go-between with a foot in both and neither camps [his personal field of comitragedy]) suggestively licenses the laity to adjudicate clerical matter previously reserved to the ordained. In the *Repressor*, for example, Pecock makes a rather scholastic distinction between the crafts of the cutler and the spurrier in order to prove the separateness of Scripture and moral philosophy.<sup>7</sup> The cutler and the spurrier may share some of the same skills, but that does not make a cutler a spurrier or vice versa. To the same theological end, Pecock extends this scholastic dis-

6 Ibid., 49–50.

7 Ibid., 50.

inction between these crafts to one made between knights and priests: just because a man may be both a knight and a priest does not mean that, in him, priesthood is knighthood:

3it herfore tho craftis in thilk man ben not the lasse dyuerse, ne neuer the lasse kepen her seueralte in boundis and markis as in hem silf, thou3 oon man be learned in hem bothe and can wirche hem bothe and hath hem bothe. 3it it is impossible the oon of tho craftis forto entre and entermete with the trouthis of the othere, thou3 oon man can wirche in hem bothe: for thanne tho ij. craftis weren not ij. dyuerse craftis not subordynat. And thus ou3te be avoidid this obieccioun, ri3t as thou3 a man were a kny3t and a preest; 3it kny3thode in thilk man is as fer a twynne fro preesthode in the same man, (as bi her bothe naturis and beingis, thou3 not yn place or persoon,) as ben kny3thode in oon persoon and preesthode in an other persoon.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, because of this, these crafts in the same man are no less diverse nor do they keep their distinctiveness any the less within their bounds and markers in their own right, though one man may be learned in them both and perform them both and is in possession of both of them. Yet it is impossible for one of those crafts to intrude on and mingle with the truths of the other, though one man can work in them both: for then those two crafts would not be two diverse crafts with neither subordinate to the other. And thus this objection must be invalidated, just as if a man were a knight and a priest, yet (given the separate nature and mode of existence of both knighthood and priesthood, regardless of place or person) knighthood in this man is as far from priesthood in the same man as is knighthood in one person and priesthood in another person.

This elaborate extension of the earlier spurrier/cutler craft distinction into a similar distinction being made between two higher authoritative and more prestigious social roles not only shows an awareness of the problematics of discriminating between the religious and the political fields, it at the same time enriches the syllogism about the separateness of moral philosophy/theology and Scripture. This distinction between what is again (as with the cutler and the spurrier) naturalized through the subtle re-presentation of well-understood

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 50–51.

and accepted social roles is a bold rhetorical as well as theological move of Pecock to synthesize a dialectic with the very structures and dynamics of theology and Scripture. This dialogical transference is a very particular sort of naturalization, involving as it does a highly distinctive interplay between the social, the theological, and the personal. By inducting his lay readers and hearers into the intellectual logistics of such interplay through what they already know, Pecock is granting and expecting from them a powerful form of discretion that they can be expected to continue to exercise in the religious field from their own place of occupational authority and self-definition.

Indeed, a key quality for anyone with spiritual ambition of any kind in the late medieval period, was discretion—*discretio*—the capacity to observe and to make self-aware, properly informed spiritual judgements. In the *Repressor*, Pecock expects a form of discretion to be exercised by layfolk in appraising not only religious teaching and preaching but also the actual teachers and preachers themselves. He accordingly moves boundaries and roles by telling the laity to exercise discretion in critiquing the quality of reasoned argument of any given teacher or preacher, and in taking care in choosing (and even in dispensing with) their priests. Let it not be forgotten that in mid-fifteenth century London there was a determined policy to employ only graduates in the pulpit, thereby safeguarding the intellectual quality of preaching and of devotional culture more generally.<sup>9</sup> The well-heeled mercantile and politically active laity of the capital were increasingly theologically discriminating, demanding, and critical and did not appreciate being treated like simpletons. In other words, the mainstream bourgeoisie and gentry were already theologically engaged and devotionally ambitious before Pecock got to them, although it would be incautious to assume teleologically a pre-Reformation cultural sensibility here, horizons of change notwithstanding.

In a particularly revealing passage of the *Repressor*, Pecock, then, exhorts his lay audience to exercise discretion and reason in assessing the discourse of all who teach and preach. He warns them not to be blinded by the fame of a cleric and not to agree with a particular argument of his just because a whole host of other preachers or teachers draw the same conclusion. On the contrary, the

9 For the broader cultural and ecclesiastical context of this, see Vincent Gillespie, “Chichele’s Church,” and Sheila Lindenbaum, “London after Arundel. Learned Rectors and the Strategies of Orthodox Reform,” in *After Arundel. Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh [Medieval Church Studies 21] (Turnhout, 2011), 187–206. For a study of mainstream lay spiritual ambition in late medieval England, see Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* [Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 73] (Cambridge, 2008).

congregation must take each case independently on its merits—even if it is a statement or a conclusion by Pecock himself, who, he advertises, is just as prone to fail (and who is confident that he will fail in the future) as any other clerk. He accordingly paints a scenario in which not only men but also women come to him, converse with him, seek his advice, challenge him with the arguments of other clerics, all in all initiating and sustaining productive religious discussion and a lay community of critical piety in the best Pecockian fashion:

Certis ofte han men and wommen come to me, and seid: “Thus hath a doctour seid in this mater: and thus hath a doctour seid in thilk mater: and thus hath this famose precher prechid: and thus hath thilk famose precher prechid:” and y haue answerid azen thus: “Thou3 he and he and he and he han so tau3t and prechid, 3it [it] is not therfore and therbi euer the rather trewe, but it is vntrewe, and needis muste be vntrewe, and mai be schewid and proued undoutabili to be vntrewe.” No man conceyue bi my wordis here that y meene and lete as thou3 y neuere failed, or that y am sikir that y schal neuere faile in myn answeris; but for the experience which y haue had vpon the failing of othere doctouris and prechers, that y myzte the suerlier therby warne peple vpon the failing of clerkis.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, men and women have often come to me and said: “a doctor has said thus on this matter; and a doctor has said thus on the same matter; and this famous preacher has preached thus, and thus has the same famous preacher preached.” And against this I have answered thus: “though he and he and he and he have taught and preached so, yet it is not therefore and thereby all the more true, but it is untrue, and must necessarily be untrue, and may be shown and proved indubitably to be untrue.” No man should conceive by my words here that I mean and allow it to be thought that I never failed, or that I am sure that I shall never fail in my answers; but, given the experience that I have had of the failing of other doctors and preachers, I can the more surely thereby warn people about the failing of clerks.

Clearly, there are plenty of inquisitive conversations and debates going on in Pecock's mixed lay community of interpretation. The scene of dialogue imagined here (unless Pecock is being particularly misleading, which seems to me improbable) is good circumstantial evidence of just how complex and

<sup>10</sup> Pecock, *Repressor* (see above, n. 3), 91.

energized things were getting in mid-fifteenth century London. Note in particular how Pecock makes the important distinction throughout this passage between teaching and preaching. The former, teaching, was not necessarily part of church activities but of educational institutions and of other improving fora (such as Whittington College, in which he was involved) and of more informal circles around fraternities, guilds, households, and the circulation and reading of common-profit books.<sup>11</sup> The latter, the office of preaching, had to be carried out by a licensed ordained priest as part and parcel of *cura animarum* and the duties of pastoral care. Pecock wants his readers to use their judgment not only in assessing the preaching administered to them by others, but also in assessing his own “wordis” and his own “answeris” too. The latter term, “answeris,” is significant, because it signals that Pecock is accustomed to being posed questions by the laity as well as by academic types. This assumption flows naturally into some further fascinating guidance to the laity to use their own discretion in choosing and monitoring the quality of the clerks they engage. This advice has implications for the limits of their obedience to their spiritual advisers:

Neuertheles, whanne the comoun lay peple doon as weel and as diligentli as thei kunnen forto chese to hem a wijs and a sufficient clerk into her counseiler, thei ben excusid anentis God in trowing to his counseil and in folewing it, thou3 his counseiling be vntrewe, vnto tyme thei mowe asprie the defaut of the same counseil.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, when the common lay people do as well and as diligently as they know how to in order to choose for themselves a wise and sufficient clerk to be their counsellor, they are excused in the eyes of God for believing in his counsel and for following it—though his counselling may be untrue—until that time that they may perceive the faultiness of the same counsel.

11 For this, see Wendy Scase, “Reginald Pecock, John Carpenter and John Colop’s Common-Profit Books. Aspects of Book Ownership and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century London,” *Medium Aevum* 61 (1992), 261–274. For discussion of Pecock’s attitude to managing a potentially critical and lively laity, see Allan F. Westphall, “Reconstructing the Mixed Life in Reginald Pecock’s *Reule of Crysten Religioun*,” in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ. Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall [Medieval Church Studies 24] (Turnhout, 2013), 267–284, esp. 267–270.

12 Pecock, *Repressor* (see above, n. 3), 92.

Lay people, as is routine in confessional practice, are exculpated if they sincerely but mistakenly follow the teaching of a clerk in error, yet Pecock goes so far here as to expect them from the outset to keep a beady eye of discretion on such a clerk and to get rid of him once a serious fault is aspired and comprehended. Here, Pecock's advocacy of critical reason would promote the laity somewhat further up the hierarchy as agents in the religious field than was routinely the case in mid-fifteenth century England.

Pecock provides further elaboration on the tricky topic of the insufficiencies of priests. In a conventional defence of the ordained clergy, mindful of the Lollard claim that a priest in a state of sin was unfit to administer the sacraments or preach effectively, he reminds his readership that a sinful priest, despite his moral deficiencies, may nevertheless be a perfectly good and efficacious expositor of holy writ: "Open experience schewith that a viciose man is as kunnyng a clerk for to finde, learne, and vndirstonde which is the trewe and dew sentence of Holi Scripture" (open experience shows that a sinful man is as capable a clerk for the purposes of finding, learning, and understanding what is the true and necessary exposition/teaching of Holy Scripture).<sup>13</sup> This orthodox position, for all its awkwardness, is expressed as common knowledge, "[o]pen experience"—something for his readers to be looking out for and something that they already understand and would commonly enough recognize. Again, the laity is being asked to make quite challenging distinctions on the basis of readily available social and mental skills and knowledge. It is particularly noteworthy here that Pecock further qualifies his understanding of this problematic area by reassuring his lay audience that no congregant led into error by a failing clerk will be punished for it by God. On the contrary, the Almighty will overlook such error and also take a positive account of such laypersons' faith and obedience in trusting their priest: "he wole bothe excuse thee, and reward thee in thi worchingis and servycis, whanne thou failist bi the faile of thi rewlars" (he will both excuse you and reward you for your doings and acts of service when you fail by the failure of your rulers).<sup>14</sup>

Though he is provocatively positive in his bid to endorse and upgrade the critical capabilities and socio-religious functions of the laity, Pecock is also keenly careful to show just what can go wrong when layfolk get above themselves when, allegedly like Lollards (the so-called "lay partie") and Husites, they confect their own interpretations of Scripture. Ignoring "substantial learned clerkis," such insufficiently educated lay individuals will, claims

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>14</sup> Pecock, *Book of Faith* (see above, n. 3), 220.

Pecock, inevitably produce a multiplicity of interpretations and end up scragging like dogs in a market place, for when

the lay parti wolen attende and truste to her owne wittis, and wolen lene to textis of the Bible oonli, y dare weel seie so many dyuerse opinions schulden rise in lay mennys wittis bi occasioun of textis in Holy Scripture aboute mennys moral conuersacioun, that al the world schulde be cumbrid therwith, and men schulden accorde to gidere in keeping her seruice to God, as doggis doon in a market, whanne ech of hem terith otheris coot.<sup>15</sup>

the lay party wish to pay heed and trust to their own wits, and desire to rely on texts of the Bible only, I dare well say that so many diverse opinions should arise in laymen's wits through the occasion of texts of Holy Scripture concerning men's moral discourse, that all the world shall be encumbered with them, and men should together be reconciled in keeping their service to God as dogs do in a market when each of them tears other's coats.

The market, no longer a place of exchange and respectable trade, is now the venue for heretics and misguided *idiotae* reduced to a dogfight, or worse, to the catastrophic situation in Bohemia—to

figting and into werre and bateil; ... Certis in this wise and in this now seid maner and bi this now seid cause bifille the rewful and wepeable destrucioun of the worthi citee and vniuersite of Prage, and of the hool rewme of Beeme.<sup>16</sup>

fighting and to war and battle; ... Certainly, in this wise and in this aforesaid manner and because of this aforesaid cause, befell the rueful and lamentable destruction of the worthy city and university of Prague and of the whole realm of Bohemia.

Pecock's counter-model to Bohemian chaos is rational discussion geared to widely based scrutiny and acceptance of valid argument and evidence. Merely to believe that one's argument is right and incontrovertibly constructed on con-

<sup>15</sup> Pecock, *Repressor* (see above, n. 3), 85–86.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

ventional scholastic grounds is not good enough: the open institutional agreement of the Church is required. Pecoock insists on this in both the discourses and behaviours of the Church in its treatment of the laity, and also in anyone questioning Church doctrines or discourses, especially if that person is issuing a challenge that might be deemed heretical:

If thou seie that thou canst prove, cleerli and undoutabili, that the chirche errith in the seid maters, y ask of thee, to whom canst thou it prove; whether to thi silf oonli, or to othere men. If thou seie, to thi silf al oon, thanne makist thou thi silf iuge in thin owne cause, and forto so do it is over myche perilose in maters of lasse charge than these ben. And y trowe that thou woldist not counseil eny man forto trust his owne witt al oon, in eny other mater lasse than this mater is.<sup>17</sup>

If you say that you can prove, clearly and indubitably, that the Church errs in the said matters, I ask of you to whom can you prove it, whether it be to yourself only or to other men? If you say to yourself alone, then you make yourself the judge in your own cause—and to do so is excessively perilous in matters of less weight/charge than this matter is. And I believe that you would not counsel any man to trust solely in his own wit in any other matter less than this matter is.

Pecoock accepts that those in authority in the Church may at times get things wrong and must therefore be open to correction. Failure by a doctrinal challenger to convince the Church by valid argument of its error, on the other hand, is a failure to exercise and to communicate reason. Such a failure, for Pecoock, is no light matter, for unreasonable disagreement with the Church in itself is heresy. Despite this, Pecoock's appeal to openly scrutinized reason, to "make the seid othere men, and the chirche forto consente to the same party, and forto forsake the contrarie parti, whiche thei now holden" (make the said other men and the church consent to the same position and forsake the contrary position that they now hold),<sup>18</sup> surely provided a better and more benign occasion for active lay participation in the effective functioning of the church than did policies of unreasoning brute force, or unreflective devotion or naïve superstition. Pecoock's prioritization of reason, to be exercised in the religious field and

17 Pecoock, *Book of Faith* (see above, n. 3), 196–197.

18 *Ibid.*, 198.

in the vernacular by layfolk, however, despite its potential sustainability to a significant degree, failed to be taken up and was in due course turned against him.

In conclusion, what Pecock variously says in his surviving works enriches modern understanding of the configurations and risks endemic to the fraught issue of the transference, supervision, negotiation, and withholding of religious and political capital amongst laity and clergy in mid-fifteenth-century England. By invoking an interplay of scholastic theological discourse and the everyday working knowledge of layfolk, Pecock endeavoured to interpellate a new community of interpretation in the mainstream and to divert dissenters back into that mainstream. Where he parted company with orthodox cultural practice and sensibility (and, more perilously, with the powers that be) was in his insistence on the exercise of the doom of reason above and beyond the Bible and in his certainty that his oeuvre constituted a viable new format for doctrine and catechesis downgrading traditional discourses such as the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Works of Corporal Mercy, and even the Articles of the Creed.<sup>19</sup> To sideline such familiar discourses and practices was never going to catch on either with the clergy or with the laity. Likewise, the extent to which, from the top down, Pecock aimed to turn layfolk into rudimentary religious sub-specialists, for all its distinctiveness and promise, alarmed the wrong people in the ecclesiastical and political establishment.

It must be kept in mind, however, that, for a long time before his conviction for heresy, Pecock managed to keep religion and politics from being detrimentally snarled up with each other. It was not so much that the boundaries between religion and politics were not negotiable for him, but that, through a confluence of political circumstances that need not have happened, his challenges to both religious and political norms came to be too openly perceived as being too threateningly near to primal sources of habitual power. And so, he went from the status of episcopal specialist to that of failed prophet. In attempting strategically to conserve the hierarchy, he found himself being turned on by the hierarchy. It all went wrong because he misrecognized local politics, and local politics significantly misrecognized him. It could have turned out differently, had the Bishop of Chichester not provoked that fatal chain of events. Indeed, Vincent Gillespie has recently judged that Pecock would have been amongst the intellectual leaders of the Church, had events not taken a

<sup>19</sup> Pecock, *Donet* (see above, n. 3), 146–147.

highly contingent turn for the worse for him in the 1450s.<sup>20</sup> To this one can add the observation that Reginald Pecock's works chiefly became yet more explicitly offensive and beyond the pale after they were banned—not just because of their contents but more palpably because of the horribly public fall and shaming of the man who wrote them. What the works meant was significantly changed for the worse and they became ignorable, unread, unknown, and absent: the texts (or at least the few extant manuscripts that survived the flames) shifted boundary once Reginald Pecock moved beyond the bounds of acceptability himself.

Pecock's failure was also caught up with his entanglement with the theological vernacular. Although he used English for theological purposes at a time when Lollardy was seen by as the "heresy of the vernacular," and although he was convicted at his trial of the crime of writing to the laity on theological matters in the common tongue, his use of it for pastoral and expository purposes was perfectly legal. This was because he was a bishop and was therefore thoroughly entitled to license himself in expounding the Bible or treating theological issues in English. Moreover, though it may also look rather subversive that he customarily turned to the Lollard Bible for biblical quotations, his doing so was not necessarily anything like as subversive as his enemies would doubtless have loved to make out. One should remember, in this context, that the Wycliffite Bible was translated in a perfectly orthodox scholarly manner.<sup>21</sup> It was its paratext (its plethora of prologues and affiliated treatises) that was polemical and unorthodox, not the translation itself. Let it not be forgotten that huge numbers of manuscripts of this Bible, unsurprisingly enough, were owned by non-dissenters, including perfectly respectable orthodox aristocrats. Pecock was, then, not necessarily so dangerous or transgressive when he quoted from it.

The misrecognitions of Pecock and the misrecognitions by Pecock intrinsic to his personal dynamics of failure are revealing about the configurability of the religious and political fields of his times. Following Bourdieu, Philip S. Gorski tells us that "one of the most common ways in which dominant actors conceal

20 Vincent Gillespie, "Fatherless Books. Authorship, Attribution and Orthodoxy in later Medieval England," in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ. Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall [Medieval Church Studies 24] (Turnhout: 2013), 151–196, at 177.

21 For this, see Mary Dove, *The First English Bible. The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* [Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 66] (Cambridge, 2007); also ead. (ed.), *The Earliest Advocates of the English Bible. The Texts of the Medieval Debate* (Exeter, 2010) and Anne Hudson, *Doctors in English. The Study of the Wycliffite Gospel Commentaries* [Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies] (Liverpool, 2015).

the arbitrary nature of their power from themselves and others is by grounding it in nature.”<sup>22</sup> As far as the authorities were concerned, Pecock, with his maxim that divine matters were grounded not in Scripture but in God-given reason as a law of nature, proposed something scandalously unnatural. It was never going to be easy for him to get people to believe that artificial-looking scholastic reason could be more ordinary and authoritative than Holy Writ. In this case, the boundary between Scripture and reason (religion and philosophy), was not a boundary to be renegotiated. His misrecognition of the valorized idioms and ideology of late medieval mainstream scripturality was all the more ironic, seeing that his agenda was to out-argue the Bible men, the Lollards, and to bring them into the mainstream. This irony is of course intensified when one considers how often he turned to the Wycliffite Bible for quotations.

Given that the case of Reginald Pecock is so fraught with ironies, paradoxes, misperceptions, missed categorizations, paradigmatic flips, and “might have beens,” is such a case more helpful or more unhelpful for the purpose of deploying the kind of theory that this thematic section is attempting to examine as a resource for appraising religious change and religious fields? I would contend that it is, in the main, helpful because such a case may be seen as a sensitive marker of actual and potential change and also of what was at stake in potential change, even if unrealized in historic religious fields. The dynamics and boundaries of failure are, in their own way, as eloquent and as revealing as those of success in delineating the constitution and dynamics of fields, players, capital, and habitus. Failure bestows its own particular perspectives of nuance and contingency. The productive confusion and interpretative difficulties central to such cases may also have the benefit of reminding us that theoretical methodologies—their terms and concepts—are but useful combinations of metaphors. Metaphor represents something as something it is not. Theories, even when they use terms like “objective fields,” are inescapably fictions ungrounded in that of which they speak. Unlike Reginald Pecock, we do not have a transcendent law of natural reason to fall back on. But, then again, neither did he.

22 Philip S. Gorski, “Bourdieuian theory and historical analysis. Maps, Mechanisms and Methods,” in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. Philip S. Gorski (Durham NC—London, 2013), 327–366, at 353. For a useful commentary on Bourdieusian theory with regard to religion, see David Swartz, “Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion. Pierre Bourdieu’s Political Economy of Symbolic Power,” *Sociology of Religion* 57.1 (1996), 71–85. See also Pierre Bourdieu, “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field,” *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991), 1–44 and Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, “The Logic of Fields,” in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, 1992), 94–115.