The inseparable interrelation of the concepts of dynamics and stability is one of the most important elements in the study of religious history. On the one hand, the examination of the ‘dynamics’ involved here prevents the misapprehension of religious traditions as spatially and temporally stable, closely defined and autarkical entities. The notion, therefore, represents a modern scholarly claim. On the other hand, some concept of ‘stability’ involved allows the scholarly examination of phenomena of religion in the first place. In addition to that, stability is one of the most important claims in the self-characterization of religious traditions. Among others, the notion represents a claim of the object-language that cannot be ignored in scholarly description. The basic question is how to present a religious tradition as being subject to dynamics or how religions might be described dynamically while at the same time taking into account object-language claims and epistemological necessities of a certain stability.

Situations of religious contact play a key role in dynamizing the development of a religious tradition as well as in stabilizing one. As for the latter, they provide reason for the rise of stable material objects (that are the bases of scholarly examination) and, therefore,
introduce a dynamics, i.e. an intensification of expression. As basic forms of intensification one might consider sacralisation (i.e. the utilization of religious elements in other areas thus intensifying meaning) and self-reference (i.e. the systematization of religion as a religion, which leads to the emergence of a religious field, a notion of religion, a canon, dogmatics etc.). Opposite developments, i.e. the diffusion of expression or de-sacralisation via the influence of another religious tradition are as well manifestations of the dynamizing, or rather stabilizing effect of contact situations.

One may analytically differentiate between three basic types of dynamics: inherent dynamics (development, growth and decay, differentiation, crystallization, ‘densification’), external dynamics (demarcation, inclusion etc.) and phenomena of transfer combining internal and external elements regarding push- and pull factors. The three types might be further investigated with regard to two basic forms of movement that is movement within space (expansion, shifting, withdrawal, material translocation) and movement within time (change of theory and practice, stabilizing, formation of canon etc.).

Articles relating to the topic of ‘dynamics and stability’ devote themselves to collecting and evaluating forms of dynamics that can be found with regard to a contact situation in the history of religion, for example phenomena of expansion, transfer, intensification, leveling, crystallizing, growth and decline etc., that might be used for a more adequate description of religious history. Of course, the concept itself might be investigated due to its presuppositions and heuristic value for scholarly research.