

**LIBERTAS SPIRITUS:
THE FREE SPIRIT OF MARGUERITE
PORETE**

**(A STUDY OF HERESY AND MYSTICISM IN THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY)**

Erin Vosti
Hist 194H
1996-97

Director: Professor Marcuse
Mentor: Professor Lansing

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1296 by Gui II, Bishop of Cambrai, several copies remained in wide circulation throughout Europe.

LIBERTAS SPIRITUS

After the book was burned, Porete was warned by Church leaders to discontinue her life of preaching and wandering. Porete, however, continued to wander and preach. As a result, she was jailed for year and a half. Given several opportunities to renounce her heresy, and absolve herself, Porete refused, and on May 31st, 1310, was ordered to die at the stake.

This is a study of Porete's persecution. I will argue that Porete was not

It seems to me that thus it is
A woman becomes good for God;
In the simplicity of her understanding
Her gentle heart, her frailer mind
Are kindled more quickly within her,
So that in her desire she understands better
The wisdom flowing from Heaven
Than does a hard man
Who is clumsy in these things.

-Lamprecht of Regensburg c. 1250

(From *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe*)

Porete was also loosely associated with the Beguines, a non-approved order of religious women. Marguerite Porete was burned alive at the stake at the Place de Greve in Paris on June 1st, 1310. She had written a book called *The Mirror of Simple Souls* which emphasized a union with God on earth. Porete asserted in *The Mirror* that through the annihilation of the virtues, the soul could achieve a unity with God. *The Mirror*, according to Church leaders, was considered heretical because it taught that the soul could be united with God without the mediation of the Church, and without the observance of Christian values. Although the book was ordered to be burned sometime between 1296 and

1306 by Gui II, Bishop of Cambrai, several copies remained in wide circulation throughout Europe.

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This is a study of Porete's persecution. I will argue that Porete was not condemned purely because of her religious beliefs. Porete did not establish herself as a traditional female mystic, a movement that had been accepted by the Church, but only under specific criteria. Her book and her lifestyle were independent, and did not heed the example of traditional female mystics who were accepted by the Church. Instead, Porete lived a religiously independent life, preaching her ideas of the liberated soul, a theme prevalent in her book.

Porete was also loosely associated with the Beguines, a non-approved order of religious lay people who lived the *vita apostolica* - a life of poverty, chastity, and emulation of Christ. Both religious institutions were associated with heresy, or, in the case of mysticism, had an already-constituted set of norms accepted by the Church. I will look at the late medieval mystical tradition in order to understand her persecution and prove that her book was condemned because what it preached was not in the mystical tradition. I will also discuss the religious movements of both the beguines, the Free Spirits, and the Inquisition (the movement under which

Porete was accused of heresy) in order to understand her death. Porete crossed the thin line between heresy and heterodoxy in a time of religious persecution. Church inquisitors who were charged to rid France and Europe of heresy. *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was written in the tradition of courtly love poetry. As a dialogue between Love, Reason, and the Soul, this book was, as Ellen Babinsky¹ suggests, a "handbook designed to assist believers with their spiritual quest". Porete guides her readers through this dialogue to the appropriate way in which an individual can reach a divine union with God. The methods of achieving this union, described by Porete as Seven States of Grace of the Soul, are by annihilating the will and desires of human nature. By dissolution of the will, or virtues of human nature, the soul is able to unite with God here on earth. The soul is then transformed, not just in unity with God, but as God and the Trinity.

Porete's notion that the soul can annihilate the will and virtues is seen as controversial by Church leaders, as she assumes a great deal of authority in her book. Her polemical theory that the soul possess the ability to separate from desire without the mediation of the Church also asserts the ideas of the free spirit movement which was ruled heretical by the Church. In addition, *The Mirror* assumes great authority on spiritual perfection, while implicating Porete of the book's heresies as it is difficult to separate her as merely author of the book, and not the voice of the book. Most importantly, however, is the lack of bodiliness in *The Mirror* - compared to contemporary mystical texts,

¹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 24.

the book clearly lacks any physicality which traditionally established a woman's religious authority. For these reasons, Porete constitutes herself as a target for Church inquisitors who were charged to rid France and Europe of heresy.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRIAL OF MARGUERITE PORETE

¹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 24.

Marguerite Porete's death at the stake was a result of many contributing factors. For one, she was associated with the beguine movement. She was also the author of a book that was condemned and burned years earlier by Bishop Gui II of Cambrai. Yet she still continued to travel and preach the notions in her book, despite stern warnings from Bishop Gui to end her life of wandering. Porete was also a non-traditional mystic, as we can learn much from her imprisonment and her trial. Her trial records and sentencing may not explain exactly why she was put to death; however, it gives us an insight into the determination and pertinacity of a woman accused of preaching and spreading her ideas. It is important to examine her trial in order to understand the circumstances under which she died.

CHAPTER ONE

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Porete refused to take an oath that would absolve her of heresy, although she was given several opportunities. It is said that the spectators of Porete's death were moved to tears because of the empathy she caused. The trial records have survived and were found amongst the records of two royal officials from the court of Philip the Fair, named William of Nogaret and William of Plaisians.² The trial record and sentencing of Porete are published in the original Latin in Henry Charles Lea's book on the Inquisition (please see Appendix II and III).³ In addition, Ellen Babinsky has a translated version of Porete's trial in her translation of Porete's *The Mirror*.

² Dubinsky, 20.

³ Henry Charles Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857) 515-518.

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² Babinsky, 20.

³ Henry Charles Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887) 575-578.

Porete In 1308, Porete was arrested by William of Paris, a Dominican inquisitor. She was arrested along with a later "self-proclaimed" defender of Porete's named Guiard de Cressonessart. For a year and a half, Porete was given several opportunities to absolve herself of the heresy she was imprisoned for; however, she refused to appear in court in front of the inquisitorial committee, and even declined to swear an oath, going against inquisitorial process.⁴ She was then excommunicated by William of Paris.

Paris A year and a half later, in April of 1310, William of Paris assembled a group of theologians and professors (five professors, eleven theologians)⁵ to ask for their counsel on the trial of Porete. On April 3, 1310, the group of theologians met with William of Paris and advised him that Porete had to repent of her heresy, otherwise, she should be turned over to the secular authorities. Babinsky explains the canonist's distaste for Porete's stubbornness, "The canonists judged her to be contumacious, rebellious, and deserving to be condemned as a heretic and to be given over to the secular courts unless she should repent immediately before or after the sentence."⁶ The first meeting with the canonists was held to advise William of Paris - Babinsky suggests that it was also held as "an ultimate threat of death to the prisoners."⁷ Although she does not prove this suggestion, Babinsky makes an

interesting argument, showing that even if she was threatened with death, was suspected of heresy, in rebellion and insubordination, she would not respond nor swear before the inquisitor to those things pertaining to the office of inquisitor. The inquisitor set up a case against her

⁴ Babinsky, 21.

⁵ Babinsky, 20. These data seems to be agreed upon by scholars.

⁶ Babinsky, 21. Paul Verheyen suggests that in order to counter the weight of the approval of the three

⁷ Babinsky, 21. approved Porete's text, William of Paris needed to seek the opinion of twenty-one.

Porete still refused to deny what she had believed and had been teaching, that is, the notion of the free soul as preached in her book.

On April 11, 1310, twenty-one theologians were ordered by William of Paris to read fifteen chapters from *The Mirror*, which he had extracted. They were to judge its content, ruling that the chapters, and the book, were heretical. Even though the book had been burned several years earlier by Bishop Gui (sometime between 1296-1306),⁸ it is suspected that William of Paris needed as much evidence of Porete's heresy as possible. Porete had received the approval of three respectable theologians for her book which was included as a last chapter in *The Mirror* (please see Appendix I). It is also quite possible that William of Paris needed as much weight as possible against Porete.⁹

On May 9, 1310, the council met for a second time and declared Porete a "relapsed heretic". She was charged with continuing to spread her beliefs expressed in *The Mirror* (it is interesting to note that in the following translation of the case against her, she was also charged with having a copy of the already-condemned book in her possession) and she was ordered to be turned over to the secular authorities as a traitor. The case against her has been translated as follows:

The case is as follows. From the time that Marguerite called Porete was suspected of heresy, in rebellion and insubordination, she would not respond nor swear before the inquisitor to those things pertaining to the office of inquisitor. The inquisitor set up a case against her

⁸ Babinsky, 22. These dates seem to be agreed upon by scholars.

⁹ Babinsky, 22. Paul Verdeyen suggests that in order to counter the weight of the approval of the three theologians that approved Porete's text, William of Paris needed to seek the opinion of twenty-one.

nevertheless, and by the deposition of many witnesses¹⁰ he found that the said Marguerite had composed a certain book containing heresies and errors, which had been publicly condemned and solemnly burned as such on the order of the Reverend Father Lord Guy, formerly bishop of Cambrai. The above-said bishop had ordered in a letter that if she attempted again to propagate by word or writing such things as were contained in this book, he would condemn her and give her over to the judgment of the secular court. The inquisitor learned next that she had acknowledged, once before Reverend Father Lord Philip, the next bishop of Cambrai, that she still had in her possession, even after the condemnation mentioned above, the said book and others. The inquisitor learned also that the said Marguerite, after the condemnation of the book, had sent the said book containing the same errors to the Reverend Father Lord John, by the grace of God bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne. And she had not only sent this book to this Lord, but also to many other simple persons, beghards, and others, as if it were good.¹¹

William of Paris officially condemned Porete on the 31st of May in 1310. She still refused to absolve herself of heresy.¹² The next day she was led to the stake. By examining her trial, it is learned that Porete truly believed in her so-called heretical ideas about a liberated soul. Even with the threat of death, Porete refused to save herself by taking an oath of faith required by the inquisitorial process. This evidence reveals a woman who was steadfast but truly dedicated. And though her death was over-determined, many factors contributed to her death, it was her non-traditional mystical ideas and life-style that contributed the most to her death.

¹⁰ Documents containing the testimony of witnesses may not have survived.

¹¹ Babinsky, 23. This is translation is by Babinsky, translated from Porete's case held in the *Archives Nationales*, published by Paul Verdeyen.

¹² Babinsky, 22.

Marguerite Porete was charged with heresy during a time in which the papacy launched a campaign to stamp out heresy which Church leaders perceived as threat to Christian doctrine. The Inquisition, as it was called, was established in France in the thirteenth century. Inquisitors were selected by the Pope and placed in towns where these dedicated and pious men circulated locally in search of accusations against individuals of heresy. The Church was concerned with self-preservation and was intent on annihilating any traces of heresy from local towns. Porete was considered a hazard to Church doctrine, and inquisitors charged her with heresy. Therefore, to understand her death, it is important to understand the political and religious climate under which she died.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INQUISITION

The driving force behind the Inquisition was the belief that the good of Christian community was more important than the rights of the individual. Preserving the doctrines of Christianity and its institution were the motivating factors in the detection of dissent amongst Christian society.

Inquisitorial Partnership: The Secular King's Role in the Inquisition

The secular government stood to benefit from the Inquisition as well. Because the King received his power from God, it was in the King's best interest, and his duty, to uphold Christian doctrine. The secular government was served by the eradication of heresy just as much as the Church. And so a partnership of sorts was formed between the papal government and the

²¹ (Rosen, 4).

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some verbal expression or even in some unacknowledged actions.¹⁴ It was the legal duty of any Christian citizen to report suspicions of heresy to the

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¹⁴ Ullmann, 41.

¹³ Ullmann, 41.

secular and local government. The inquisitors in Paris had use of local evidence and, above all, to the fama, that is, common talk and general prisons in which to house individuals accused of heresy, and local authorities cooperated with the imprisonment of heretics. In other words, local magistrates could not interfere with the inquisitorial process by releasing prisoners. Papal legislation ordered that it was the "legal duty"¹⁴ of the local government to eradicate heresy. If the local magistrates and authorities did not comply with this, they themselves were to be threatened with the charge of aiding heresy.

The Detection of Heresy

The detection of heresy by the inquisitors relied on the assertion of unusual behavior or verbal utterance, and not belief. Walter Ullmann explains that inquisitors depended on "unaccustomed actions". He explains that because the lines between orthodoxy and heresy are "fluid" and therefore "an aberration of faith could without great efforts be detected in some verbal expression or even in some unaccustomed actions."¹⁵ It was the legal duty of any Christian citizen to report suspicions of heresy to the inquisitors.¹⁶ If an individual suspected another of heresy, his suspicion was evidence enough. Ullmann asserts, "...recourse had to be made to statements, expressions, gestures, actions, and so on, which in one way or another could serve or could be interpreted as an *indictum*, as circumstantial evidence, for an aberration from faith. Direct proof was, considering the nature of the

¹⁴ Ullmann, 34.

¹⁵ Ullmann, 33.

¹⁶ Ullmann, 33.

crime of heresy, not easily obtainable. Hence the resort to hearsay evidence and, above all, to the *fama*, that is, common talk and general report in a locality or community.¹⁷

As a result of the reliance on what Ullmann calls "hearsay", there was no chance of an individual to disprove or defend the accusations of heresy lodged against him or her. Witnesses to an individual's heresy were allowed only if they were reporting against the accused.¹⁸ Once an individual was convicted of heresy, appeals were not allowed. Only in rare instances, and with the offer of favors, was an individual able to appeal to the Pope.¹⁹

Justice for an individual accused of heresy was not a high priority for inquisitors. The papacy charged individuals who were pious and dedicated to the eradication of heresy in Christian society with detecting heresy. These men were well-educated and versed in law, but were not interested in handing out justice. Their goal was to exterminate doctrinal divergence.

Ullmann argues that the detection of heresy was anything but impartial:

The inquisitors were men trained in the law, trained in that science that had as its core the implementation of justice. There is hardly one item in the whole inquisitorial procedure that could be squared with the demands of justice; on the contrary, every one of its items was a denial of justice or a hideous caricature.²⁰

The lack of justice for an individual accused of heresy was not the result of a system that purposely tried to suppress the rights of an individual. Simply, there was no concept of individual rights, according to Ullmann. The Church

¹⁷ Ullmann, 44.

¹⁸ Ullmann, 32.

¹⁹ Ullmann, 29.

²⁰ Ullmann, 29.

was interested in preserving the good of the whole (*publica utilitas*), instead of the good of the individual (*privata utilitas*).²¹

Reasoning Behind the Inquisition: Publica Utilitas

The construction of heresy was based on the fact that an individual was first and foremost a Christian and lived by Christian doctrine and teachings established by the Church. The Christian, or the member of the Church, did not possess any natural human rights.²² As Ullmann states, the individual lived by the rules of Christianity and did not possess inalienable rights. He was a Christian and expected to uphold the doctrines of Christianity. Ullmann asserts, "The Christian's mode of living was directed by principles and norms which flowed from the fact of his being a Christian, that is, a member of the Church."²³ Ullmann also argues that because the "articles of faith" were defined by the papacy, it was important to recognize Christian doctrine and live by them.

The presupposition of this was the faith of the Christian: and the mouthpiece of divinity, the exponent of Christian doctrine, the organ which pronounced the individual articles of faith was, as a result of the historical and doctrinal process, the papacy.²⁴

As Ullmann suggests, the invention of heresy was based on the fact that an individual was, by definition, Christian, and was expected to live by the "articles of faith" as defined by the papacy.

²¹ Ullmann, 39.

²² Ullmann, 37.

²³ Ullmann, 37.

²⁴ Ullmann, 37.

The "mouthpiece of divinity", as Ullmann argues, was the Pope. As a Christian, following Christian doctrine and teachings also meant accepting the Pope as Christ's representative on earth. Therefore, there was no room for an individual to dispute any item of faith. By denying Christian articles, one was also denying the Pope. The act was considered heretical. As Ullmann asserts, "He who doubts is an *infidel*, and the law had declared, and is therefore a heretic."²⁵ Any attack on faith was an attack on Christ and thus an attack on the papacy and Christendom.²⁶

Accordingly, the duty of the inquisitors was to identify heretics; namely, those not living by Christian doctrine and the "articles of faith" and thereby denying the divinity of the Pope representing Christ on earth. Charles Gorham notes that the inquisitors sought to stamp out heresy as an exercise of their moral obligations, by suggesting, "Under the teaching of the Church the best men of the time regarded heresy as a manifest crime and the burning of heretics as an act of righteousness."²⁷ However, recent scholarship proposes that the inquisitors truly believed that heresy was a threat to the Church and must be eradicated for the salvation of Christian society.

²⁵ Ullmann, 38.

²⁶ Ullmann, 40.

²⁷ Charles T. Gorham, *The Medieval Inquisition* (London: Watts & Com, 1918) 37.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BEGUINS AND THE FREE SPIRITS

Independent Religion: The Beghards and Beguines

In the twelfth century, a growing number of Christians viewed the Church as corrupt and lax, and, as a result, new religious movements cropped up. Concerned with these new religious movements, and determined to reform the Church, Church leaders met at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and declared that no new orders shall be established. Because of their orthodox views and close alignment with Church policy and beliefs, the Franciscan and Dominican Orders were approved by the Council. But because of the Church's decree that no other religious groups be established, problems arose for groups of lay people who desired to live a life of spiritual perfection outside of formal vows. Those who continued to lead lives dedicated to spiritual perfection, poverty, and the imitation of the life of Christ, were not tolerated by the Church.

The beghards and beguines were among the religious movements not sanctioned by the Church. As a religious group that appeared in Northern Europe in the twelfth century, the beguins established themselves mainly in Germany and France. The movement was based on the apostolic life, or *vita apostolica*, a life of poverty, begging, preaching, and religious perfection. The apostolic life was to be led in imitation of Christ, to suffer as he did, in an effort to reach "spiritual perfection" and attain a divine union with God. The

beguins based their organization around the teachings of St. Francis, the founder of the Franciscan Order - living a life of poverty and begging,

renouncing all material possessions. Amy Hollywood writes, "The desire to beg is closely aligned to the emphasis placed on manual labor, highlighting the parallels and divergences between the aims and ideals of the early beguines and those of St. Francis and his followers in the south."²⁸ But in an age where religious women were expected to live lives of chastity in a cloister, the beguines were required to live in convents known as *beguinages*. The acceptance of the women's religious movement was dependent on their conformity to the already established religious order.²⁹

The Beguins belonged to no established order and therefore were mistrusted by the Church, even though they believed they were living the most chaste life possible. Robert Lerner asserts that the Beghards and Beguines "considered themselves in half-secular, half-religious fashion. They belonged to no approved order and followed no common rule, yet they did try to lead the apostolic life."²⁹ Their attempts at spiritual perfection were in vain, and the Church continued to worry about this religious sect. From the outset, the beguins remained under the care of the mendicant orders; in other words, the Franciscan and Dominican Orders oversaw the beguins' confessions and gave them communion.³⁰ But the orders did not necessarily want the responsibility for this religious group. The beguin movement continued to be seen as a hazard to Church authorities despite attempts to control them.

²⁸ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 43.

²⁹ Robert Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 36.

³⁰ Babinsky, 10.

Women's Religiosity: The Beguines

The perceived threat created by the beguin movement to the Church's established doctrine was extended particularly to the woman's movement. In an age where religious women were expected to live lives of chastity in a cloister, the beguines were required to live in convents known as beguinages. The acceptance of the women's religious movement was dependent on their conformity to the already established religious order³¹, that is, religious women were tolerated inasmuch as they were cloistered. Babinsky states that Church leaders "would accept only those communities of religious women who could support all their members in strict enclosure out of their own resources, without depending on alms."³² This raised suspicions of those beguines who did not live a cloistered life.

The cloistering of women was not enough to deflect the anxieties of Church leaders. Nervous about the so-called suspicious lifestyle of the Beguins, clerics doubted women who led lives of wandering and preaching, the *vita apostolica*. Joann McNamara points out, "Every preacher, confessor, and didactic writer taught women that God loved nothing but silence and humility from his feminine creatures."³³ This made it particularly difficult for a woman to speak in public without running the hazard of being humbled and shamed. As a result, McNamara adds, "German councils throughout the

³¹ Babinsky, 8.

³² Babinsky, 8.

thirteenth century restricted the public activity of the Beguines and strengthened their subordination to their pastors"³⁴

Suspicion and doubt of female religiosity was based on the Christian theory of Eve's original sin and the seductive powers of women. Her association with sin was reinforced when the Dominican Humbert de Romans who, speaking for "the majority of the clergy", admonished that women who spoke publicly or preached would incite "lust in their listeners"³⁵ This attitude toward women spurred controversy over the Beguines. Amy Hollywood connects the skepticism cast upon the Beguines with the male attitude toward women and the religious life:

The attitudes toward female mendicancy seen in the early hagiographies, together with the continual problematizing of the relationship between action and contemplation, point to the more obvious explanations of clerical suspicion and indifference to women's pursuit of these ideals. Behind the denigration of female mendicancy, absolute poverty, and pursuit of the active life lies the desire to maintain enclosure as the norm for religious women.³⁶

The problem of religious women, in particular the beguines, grew into a larger threat to the Church. The vulnerability of the Beguines became problematic when they tried to lead a life of poverty, begging, and preaching because of the Church's opinion that women should not only live in silence, but with formal vows and within the constraints of the Church's doctrine.

³³ Joann McNamara, "Clerical Authority and Female Innovation in the Struggle with Heresy", *Maps of Flesh and Light* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993) 10.

³⁴ McNamara, 10.

³⁵ McNamara, 10.

³⁶ Hollywood, 43.

The Free Spirit

The beguins were associated with the "free spirit" movement that focused on achieving union with God and the Soul on earth as a result of freeing the soul from desire and free-will.³⁷ This view of the soul was considered extremely radical, since it renounced many of the virtues held by the Church. This mystical movement is thought to have started in Paris around 1210³⁸. The movement stressed poverty, while achieving a union with God through the dissolution of the will and desires. Robert Lerner describes the Free Spirits as a group who strove to

attain union with God on earth, but they thought that they could only reach this state by means of bodily austerities and spiritual abnegation, and that attainment of the state resulted in detachment from daily concerns rather than in radical engagement of them.³⁹

The goal of the Free Spirits was to achieve a state of complete annihilation of the virtues, and by doing so, unite with God without the intervention of the Church. Not only was this view of the human soul taking leave of desire and the virtues controversial to the Church, the suggestion that this state could be reached without the Church's mediation was even more contestable. Those beguins who led a life of preaching and wandering were considered to be Free Spirits; although not all those who led a life of wandering associated with the Free Spirits, many were suspected.

³⁷ Babinsky mentions that the beguins' links to the Free Spirit are mentioned at the Council of Lyon in 1274 (13), and Grundmann mentions that the beguins had "contact" with the Free Spirits (153).

³⁸ Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1995) 153.

³⁹ Lerner, 3.

Legislation Against the Beguins

Because of the independent nature of the beguins, they were often suspected of heretical acts. Philip the Chancellor, in a sermon in the early 1230s, preached that the beghards were "tainted" and frolicked with heretics.⁴⁰ They were even called "pseudo-religious" and were thought to lead lives that looked pious and devout to the outside observer, but in reality, were fraught with scandal and impiety. Malcolm Lambert believes the mistreatment of the beguins was based on both the independent lifestyles of the beguins and the misconceptions swirling about a group who remained vulnerable to attack:

The treatment of the beguines, beghards, and mystics in Northern Europe was a more subtle case of misunderstanding in which genuine grounds for disquiet combined with suspicious conservatism and the persecuting mentality to smear pious, unprotected groups.⁴¹

With their suspicions against the beguins rising, Church leaders took steps to legislate against them.

At the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, there was another effort to reform the ecclesiastical orders. There was also an undertaking to reiterate the decree of 1215 that no new orders were to be established. Reports were ordered by the pope, and three Dominicans and Franciscans were charged with accounting the state of the Church, particularly concerning the beguin movement.⁴² The reports, which still survive, were given to the Dominican

⁴⁰ Lerner, 37.

⁴¹ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1992) 181.

⁴² Grundmann, 144.

Humbert of Romans and the Franciscan Simon of Tournai who collected the reports and presented them at the Council.

Humbert of Romans complained that the religious movement of the beguins, referring to them as the *religiosi pauperes* (religious paupers),⁴³ was a "burden" to the "monastic order". He wrote that, in particular, the beguines, as women, should not beg in the streets, let alone wander and preach. He recommended that the Church not recognize the movement unless the women lived in cloisters and supported themselves with manual labor and not by begging, or relying on alms.⁴⁴

The Franciscan Gilbert of Tournai complained that the beguines had translated the Scriptures in the vernacular and the Gallic idiom, and preached these translations, riddled with errors, to people on the street.⁴⁵

Bishop Bruno of Olmutz stated that it was deplorable of beghards to act as friars but without belonging to an approved order. He criticized their freedom from answering to a parish priests and cited their "wandering about without discipline through the cities."⁴⁶

Legislation against the beghard movement was an attempt by church leaders to "control" the religious group. Those without communal cloistering faced harassment by church officials. Lerner, citing from examples of beghards and beguines arrested on claims of heresy, mentions that the claims are vague. Lerner states that the beguines of Malines, in 1286 were

⁴³ Grundmann, 144.

⁴⁴ Grundmann 144, Lerner, 45.

⁴⁵ Lambert, 183.

"expelled from their convent 'because of their excesses and other reasons.'" ⁴⁷

It is unclear what the terms "excesses" and "other reasons" meant, but they suggest a fear in the church leaders about non-established orders that drove them to legislate against the beguin community. Lerner also mentions that in 1290 two beguines and two beguards were taken into custody in Colmar under charges of heresy, and even more were arrested in Basel for the same reasons. ⁴⁸

Distress about the beguard and beguine communities continued, following more legislation declaring their illegitimacy. The Council of Vienne met between 1311 and 1312. Church leaders were intent on squelching the beguard movement and its association with the Free Spirit. The Council created the *Ad nostrum* which acted as a handbook for inquisitors and confessors of beguards and beguines arrested for heretical acts. With a set of fixed guidelines, one could question those accused of heresy and pinpoint heretical behavior. *Ad Nostrum* defined the heresy of the Free Spirit, and "maintained that it was to be found among beguards and beguines". ⁴⁹

Within the *Ad nostrum*, a decree was created called *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* which was legislation specifically against the women, the beguines. It alleged that, because they had no formal vows, followed no organized rule, and made no attempts to give up material possessions as

⁴⁶ Lerner, 45.

⁴⁷ *Bulletin de la royale d'histoire de Belgique* LXXX (1911) Lerner, 62.

⁴⁸ Lerner, 62.

⁴⁹ Lerner, 47.

was expected of traditional mendicant orders, they were to be looked upon as a threat to the Church and seen with suspicion. Lerner asserts,

Nonetheless, it complained, they wore a special habit and some 'as if insane' discoursed on the Trinity and the divine essence. They spread opinions contrary to the articles of faith and sacraments of the Church, leading simple people into error under the pretense of sanctity.⁵⁰

Because of this legislation, beguines were banned and could not follow the apostolic life. If these women did, they were required to be cloistered, in beguinages. Lerner suggests that this was an attempt to distinguish between "good" beguines and "bad" beguines, adding that it could have been an "escape clause" added either by disagreement among Council members or as an amendment later on⁵¹. These articles, also referred to as the "Clementines" because of Pope Clement V presided over the Council, were held for revision until 1317, when they were released to Church leaders across Europe and used in inquisitions against heresy, particularly against the beguards and beguines.

Porete's association with the beguin movement was controversial not only because of their reputation as a perceived threat by the Church, but because she led a life of wandering and preaching - a lifestyle that threatened Church authorities and had been the target of legislation.

⁵⁰ Lerner, 47.

⁵¹ Lerner, 47.

MYSTICAL TRADITIONS

MYSTICAL TRADITIONS

Mystical Traditions

Moreover, devotional literature, though not specifically intended to present theological issues is didactic in that it speaks about the proper Christian life and about the proper relationship between the individual soul and the divine.⁵²

Mysticism was a religious movement that offered a personal and individual relationship with God. Mysticism was based on achieving a union with God through asceticism and religious purity and devotion. For a woman in the Middle Ages, mysticism offered an alternative to the traditional role as mother and wife. The mystical life was a way of becoming one with God and with Christ. For a woman, mysticism offered personalized religion, a chance to involve herself directly in religion. Union with God could be reached through mystical visions and contemplation. Highly personal and hard to define, it is an experience centered in the mind. Grace Jantzen describes mystics as "those whose knowledge of the divine comes by shutting out all the senses: mystical knowledge is knowledge available only to the mind or spirit that is as detached as possible from bodily concerns."⁵³ Visions traditionally gave women a direct link to God, and eventually a means to power. Jantzen adds, "An alternative source of authority about the mysteries of God might come by visions, a direct communication from God to the most humble creatures of divine creation."⁵⁴

⁵² Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 3.

⁵³ Jantzen, "Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics," *Hypatia* Fall 1994: 188.

⁵⁴ Jantzen, 189.

Women and the Body:

Recent scholarship has shown that female mysticism was related to the association of women and the body. Women traditionally were identified with the body and the flesh, a notion traceable to the writings of Aristotle. Men, in medieval Christianity, were analogous to the mind, the soul, and the spirit, while women were associated with the body and material essence. Only if a woman was truly holy, devout, and spiritual, could she be given due consideration, however, only as, in the words of recent scholars, an "honorary male."⁵⁵ Jantzen writes, "women were identified with bodiliness and that knowledge, especially in its highest forms, was the prerogative of men."⁵⁶ In other words, a woman could be as chaste and pure as possible, but only her male confessor or priest would decide if she was suitable to be an "honorary male". This association with the body is due in part to a woman's role in reproduction and her nurturing role to an infant. A woman's "material contribution" to reproduction, as Amy Hollywood suggests, identifies her with the flesh in Christianity.⁵⁷ Bynum asserts that the female's association with the flesh, the body, associates her with Christ's physical suffering, thereby women emulated Christ through their body and physicality.⁵⁸

This bodiliness expressed by women mystics also translated into other physical aspects, such as emphasis on food and the devotion to the

⁵⁵ Jantzen, 188.

⁵⁶ Jantzen, 188.

⁵⁷ Hollywood, 27.

⁵⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 176.

Eucharist. Food, because of its association with women as nurturers, extended a woman's association with the body and the physical. Bynum reports, noting the exception of Porete in the categorizing of traditional mystical methods,

With the predictable and fascinating exception of the "heretic" Margaret Porete, all thirteenth century women who wrote at length on spiritual matters emphasize the eucharist. The eucharist is important in female saints' lives from all regions and orders; in many, the eucharist and the closely associated theme of fasting...provides a leitmotif which is both the major literary device tying the story together and the underlying psychological theme of the woman's life.⁵⁹

Hollywood establishes that women traditionally used the body in their visions; "bodily images are often central vehicles of the visionary imagination."⁶⁰ Women used identification with the flesh in their visions to achieve union with God. Visions often describe graphic, and often erotic, experiences with Christ and God. Using Caroline Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* as a source, Hollywood argues that bodily associations were used as a medium in visions:

'As many recent scholars have argued, the spiritualities of male and female mystics were different, and this difference has something to do with the body...women mystics were more likely than men to receive graphically physical visions of God; both men and women were inclined to attribute to women and encourage in them intense bodily asceticisms and ecstasies. Moreover, the most bizarre bodily occurrence associated with women (e.g. stigmata, incorruptibility of the cadaver after death, mystical lactations and pregnancies, catatonic trances, ecstatic nosebleeds, miraculous inedia, eating and drinking pus, visions of bleeding hosts) either first appears in the twelfth and

⁵⁹ Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharist Devotion in the Thirteenth Century" (*Women's Studies* vol. 11, 1984, pp. 179-214) 183.

⁶⁰ Hollywood, 27.

thirteenth centuries or increase significantly in frequency at that time'.⁶¹

To give one example, Hadewijch of Brabant used the theme of suffering as a means of achieving union with God. In a vision, she hears a voice she believes is Jesus, that instructs her to endure pain, and she will experience true divine union. She writes,

"You shall suffer everything to the end with what I am, and we shall remain one. Now enjoy fruition of me, what I am, with the strength of your victory, and they shall live eternally contented through you." The Voice embraced me with an unheard of wonder, and I swooned in it, and my spirit failed me to see or hear more. And I lay in this fruition half an hour; but then the night was over, and I came back, piteously lamenting my exile, as I have done all this winter. For truly the whole winter long I have been occupied with this kind of thing. I lay there a long time and possessed love, or revelations, or anything else particular that Love gave me.⁶²

Hadewijch's visions of physical suffering, and even ecstasy, clearly give her a union with the divine. St. Gertrude the Great of Germany describes her physical suffering in the form of receiving the stigmata, the wounds of Christ, during prayer. She writes,

I declare that Thou hast freely granted my other petition - namely, that I might read Thy grief and Thy love together. But alas! This did not continue long, although I cannot accuse Thee of having withdrawn it from me; but I complain of having lost it myself by my own negligence. This Thine excessive goodness and infinite mercy has hidden from myself and has procured to me, without any merit on my part, the greatest of Thy gifts - the impression of Thy Wounds; for which be praise, honour, glory, dominion, and thanks-giving to Thee for endless ages!⁶³

⁶¹ Hollywood, 27.

⁶² Petroff, 197.

⁶³ Petroff, 226.

Other images of suffering and physical torment are described in detail in the visions of Angela of Foligno. Her desire to control her body and flesh put her through excruciating pain and agony.

Demons filled her head with visions of her soul being strung upside down so that all her virtues turned to vices; in anger, pain, tears, desperation, she pinched herself so hard that her head and body were covered with bruises, and still the torture continued. Human vices, even ones she never had known before, tormented every member of her body. Even when these desires may have shifted away from her "intimate parts" to places where she felt the pain less, so on fire was she that Friar Arnaldo prohibited it, she used natural fire to extinguish the internal burning. As her spiritual understanding deepened, her wish changed from instant death to a drawn out physically painful and tormenting ending, one in which she would experience all the sufferings of the world in her every limb and organ. Her love [Jesus] had sacrificed and so would she. Earlier she had undertaken a detailed examination of each part of her body, judging them member by member and assigning to each its due penance.⁶⁴

In yet another example, a thirteenth century mystic named Christina the Astonishing suffered extreme bodily harm in order to emulate the sufferings of Christ. Her bodily asceticism and suffering are described in several accounts of her life, written by a clergyman who knew her. She used her physicality to suffer for the souls trapped in purgatory. Hollywood writes, "Christina pursues an exhibitionistic and seemingly impossible asceticism without suffering external bodily harm. She puts her body in ovens, submerges it in boiling and then freezing water, turns herself on a wheel, and after each of these acts her body remains unscathed."⁶⁵ Her confessor writes:

⁶⁴ Laurie Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," *Maps of Flesh and Light*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993) 40. Finke uses this quote from Rudolph Bell's *Holy Anorexia*.

⁶⁵ Hollywood, 45.

Then Christina began to do those things for which she had been sent back by the Lord. She crept into fiery ovens where bread was baking and was tormented by fires just like any of us mortals so that her howls were terrible to hear. Nevertheless, when she emerged, no mutilation of any sort appeared in her body. When no oven was at hand, she threw herself into roaring fires which she found in men's houses or else she thrust her feet and hands into fires and held them there for so long that they would have been reduced to ashes had it not been a divine miracle. At other times, she jumped into cauldrons of boiling water and stood there immersed either up to the breast or the waist, depending on the size of the cauldron, and poured scalding water over those parts of her body which were untouched by the water. Although she howled as if she were suffering the pangs of childbirth, when she climbed out again she was quite unharmed.⁶⁶

Physical suffering allowed a woman mystic to suffer like Christ - her association with the body became a means of asceticism and therefore extreme piety. Physical suffering was a form of self discipline by emulating the sufferings of Christ. Bodily visions and mystical experiences could work to a female mystic's advantage. Through physical suffering, she could gain authority and power. As Christ had suffered, so too could a woman.

Mysticism as a Source of Authority: Acceptance in the Church

Through mystical visions, women were able to gain acceptance in a religion that was hierarchical and male dominated. Though she remained chaste and devout, a female mystic could transcend her traditional role as a woman in medieval society by having mystical visions and experiences.

Petroff asserts:

The female visionary was celibate; her vocation - her commitment to virginity or to chaste widowhood - exempted her

⁶⁶ Finke, 38.

from the charge of female weakness or corruption, allowing her, as St. Jerome said, to become like a man. Celibacy altered her status, moving her upward toward a position of potential authority. Visions set the seal on that authority and for a number of reasons, the two most important being that visions gave an individual woman a voice and a belief in herself as chosen to speak and also gave her an experience of inner transformation that she felt compelled to communicate with others.⁶⁷

Combined with their visions and physical suffering, women mystics gained the acceptance of the Church, although they had opponents, as we shall see.

With this acceptance came authority and power, as Jantzen suggests, "A person who was acknowledged to have direct access to God would be in a position to challenge any form of authority, whether doctrinal or political, which she saw as compatible with the divine will."⁶⁸ Many women claimed that God had turned to them because of the corruption in the church, particularly the immorality found among the male clergy. Jantzen explains that women used their visions as a way of gaining power through their selection by God to carry out divine communication:

In the high and late Middle Ages, numerous women visionaries across the European continent, including among many others the famous Gertrude the Great and Mechtilde of Hefta, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Antwerp, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, and Teresa of Avila claimed authority for themselves as spiritual teachers and based that claim at least in part on the visions they had received. The construction of mysticism could no longer exclude women.⁶⁹

Through their celibacy and chastity, these mystics gained the ability and legitimacy for visionary experience and divine union with God. Petroff

⁶⁷ Petroff, 5.

⁶⁸ Jantzen, 186.

contends, "authority for them is provided by visionary experience, particularly the conviction of divine approval that comes to them with the experience of union with Christ,"⁷⁰ and union is possible only if the woman is a virgin and celibate.

Because of their limited role in religious liturgy, a woman procured authority through her visions of and physical connection to Christ. Bynum goes as far to assert that this power was seen as a alternative for "priesthood"

Increasingly prohibited from even minor clerical tasks... and never permitted full evangelical poverty or wandering, women emerged - in their own eyes and in the eyes of their male advisers - as... a "prophetic" or "charismatic" alternative. Thus the eucharist and the paramystical phenomena that often accompanied it were substitutes for priesthood...⁷¹

Although these women gained acceptance for the most part, among church leaders across Europe, they were also considered a potential threat to the Church and local clergy that recognized them. Jantzen remarks that while they had established influence and sway in the church, these women were expected to remain under the control of the men. She writes that female religiosity was accepted, insofar as the women were cloistered, asserting the attitude of the male clergy that "those who claimed knowledge of the mysteries of God should be contained within the structures of it."⁷²

Undoubtedly, in a male dominated society, the power and authority granted

⁶⁹ Jantzen, 189.

⁷⁰ Petroff, 34.

⁷¹ Bynum, *Women Mystics and Eucharist Devotion*, 193.

⁷² Jantzen, 187.

to women would have its limitations. Hollywood argues, "Yet, as I have suggested, this view of female spirituality - particularly insofar as the bodily nature of redemptive suffering is emphasized - reflects contemporary male expectations and desires."⁷³

Acceptance of women in the position of religious power was a hard pill for many clergymen to swallow, and guidelines, or restrictions, had to be placed on the women of the mystic tradition. "Strict adherence" to certain practices defined by the males of the Church included the standard vow of chastity, confinement or enclosure, and the use of a confessor, a male "director."⁷⁴ Confessors and the cloistering of women mystics allowed the Church males to remain the dominant "overseers" or controllers of women. If a woman was cloistered, or if her voice was translated through a male (as in the contemporary hagiographies), she was considered to be more acceptable.

Finke asserts that the mystical occurrence or experience was very restricted and systematized, stressing that the "model" that was set for womens' religious experiences was the cloister.⁷⁵ The mystical adventures were controlled by the Church. Finke writes

The mystical experience was highly structured, and it was the church that provided both structure and content because it controlled through various means the lives and learning of women in religious communities. Increasingly after the twelfth century, the church attempted through strict cloistering to bring religious women more firmly under its control... Orthodox mystics with few exceptions were,

⁷³ Hollywood, 49.

⁷⁴ Jantzen, 190.

⁷⁵ Finke, 37.

after the twelfth century, cloistered, in keeping with the church's sense of women's spiritual role.⁷⁶

Women had to adhere to the strict regulations.

Even those who had received divine power through the voice of God were reluctant to obey His commands without the endorsement of a clergyman. McNamara cites a mystic named Juliana of Cornillon who, for twenty years tried to convince Jesus that his bidding should be given to another source, that she was not worthy of his commands. This fear on the part of Juliana was a result of attitudes toward female piety and religiosity held by male Church leaders.. Hollywood asserts:

The attitudes toward female mendicancy seen in the early beguine hagiographies, together with the continual problematizing of the relationship between action and contemplation, point to the more obvious explanations of clerical suspicion and indifference to women's pursuit of these ideals. Behind the denigration of female mendicancy, absolute poverty, and pursuit of the active life lies the desire to maintain enclosure as the norm for religious women.⁷⁷

This attitude manifested itself into a perceived threat on the part of the Church. These women who had direct contact and communication with God were threatening to the clergy who were leery of their teachings and "theology", as McNamara points out, "They always remained fearful of empowering women to invade the male preserves and liturgy with their own innovations."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Finke, 35.

⁷⁷ Hollywood, 43.

⁷⁸ McNamara, 9.

Women simultaneously had both power and limited authority; the visions they experienced were a means by which they could gain respect within the church, while the same visions became a hindrance. We will see that Porete's lack of adherence to traditional female mysticism, a movement that was established and defined by the Church, was what made her a target for Church leaders who were unwilling to accept her as a mystic and who were quick to charge her with heresy. It is her lack of bodiliness in her mystical text, her role as a psuedomulier, as pseudo-woman that raises problems not only in her theology, but in her text. If a woman was unable to establish a role as a traditional mystic through the use of images of physicality either in visions or her text, she ran the risk of becoming a potential threat to the Church and local clergy (mainly bishops).

CHAPTER FIVE

MARGUERITE PORETE AS A HERETIC

Porète as a Heretic: The Religious, Political, and Social Implications of Her Voice and Her Text.

Porète's *Mirror* is an example of the courtly love tradition. This was a popular form of writing in the later Middle Ages and was often used to describe mystical experience. The *Mirror* is a dialogue in which the Soul seeks to be "liberated" or "annihilated" in an attempt to reach unity with God. In this dialect, Love (Amour) discusses the "conduct of the soul"⁷³ with Reason (Raison) through Seven States of Grace. This section will explore the reasons why first *The Mirror* and then Porète herself were condemned. First, *The Mirror* was controversial because of the ideas that the soul could leave the virtues and attain a unity with God without the mediation of the Church. Second, because of the polemical notions expressed in *The Mirror*, it was difficult for Church leaders to separate the voice of the text from the voice of Porète, and therefore it is implied that she spoke in her own voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARGUERITE PORETE AS A HERETIC

Third, Porète was very public and did not discontinue her life of preaching her beliefs. Fourth, Porète was not established as a traditional mystic as a result of the lack of bodiliness in her text and the absence of physicality in *The Mirror*.

Porète's Text and Its Troubling Assumptions:

Just what is so controversial in this book? Porète made enemies within the Church through the *Mirror* for several different reasons. Thirty chapters

⁷³ Lerner, 201.

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⁷⁹ Lerner, 201.

were presented to a panel of clergy, who examined them for heresy. What these clergy found heretical is not clearly documented; evidently certain parts were too radical for orthodoxy, and one can only speculate as to what it was they found that offended them. The excerpted chapters contained ideas about free souls, a soul being able to liberate itself from the virtues and the will and desire of humankind, the "annihilation" of the soul's desire and will. In addition, the character of Love speaks about Holy Church the Little (*La Petite Eglise*) and Holy Church the Great (*La Grande Eglise*). Holy Church the Little, represents the established Christian church on earth, and Holy Church the Great denotes the church of God in heaven. Because Porete is identified with the soul in her book, the soul that is aligned with the Holy Church the Great, Porete herself is therefore identified with the Holy Church the Great, and is free to judge Holy Church the Little.

Like the Seraphins, the Soul has six wings and nothing stands between "its love and divine love."⁸⁰ This implies that the soul is united with the Holy Trinity. But Porete's enemies did not find fault with the morality expressed in the book; it is the fact that the soul becomes so liberated, as if to imply that it has left all obedience of morals and the Scriptures. In the fifth and sixth states of the soul, when Porete compares the liberated state of the soul to angels. The view that the soul can become "annihilated", Lerner

⁸⁰ Lerner, 203.

suggests, seemed to the clergy theologically questionable because the soul has "no independent needs or desires."⁸¹

Lerner points out that the most troubling assumption of the *Mirror* is the idea that one does not need the intervention of traditional means to salvation. The soul "does not seek God by penance, nor by any sacrament of the Holy Church, nor by thoughts, words, or works."⁸² This independent religious salvation is, without argument, a stab at the view that Christians need the mediation of the Church in order to "save their souls". Although Porete's belief that the soul can unite with God was in step with orthodox mystical traditions, as both Lambert and Lerner have suggested Porete took it a step further by suggesting that the soul would actually become deified itself.

Chapter 2 of *The Mirror* would seem highly heretical -her dismissal of the Church's Christian values questions traditional doctrine. The following translation of the *Mirror's* Chapter 2 is where the soul takes leave of the virtues:

Virtues, I take leave of you Love for evermore: Reason in the text and
I'll have a freer heart for that - more joyful, too.
Your service is too unremitting - indeed I know.

For a time I set my heart on you inseverably, ed the voices were one
you know that to you I was surrendered totally;
so I used to be you slave - now I am free...

I suffered many a torment thus, bore many a pain:
it is a marvel second to none that I escaped alive.

⁸¹ Lerner, 204. 85; Lerner, 36.

⁸² Lerner, 205.

Yet since it is so, I am unconcerned:
for which I thank the God on high - I am severed from you,
me... the day is good to

I have quit your tyrannies; now I am at peace.⁸³

Lambert, on Porete's statement that the soul abandons virtues, asserts that she was not truly represented in her trial. He states,

The *Mirror* is very doubtful on the passivity of the liberated soul and on its lack of any need for the sacrament, and presumptuous on the state of union with God in the fifth and sixth states; on the otherhand, it is not libertine.⁸⁴

Porete's inquisitors accused her of heresy because she stated that the soul was without virtue, "giving to nature, without remorse, all that it asks."⁸⁵ But the inquisitors ignored her follow-up statement that it is not without restraint, that it "does not demand anything prohibited."⁸⁶ Those beliefs were never acknowledged in her trial.⁸⁷

The Voice of Porete

It is difficult, when speaking about Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, to distinguish between the voices of Love, the Soul, and Reason in the text and the voice of Porete herself. Scholars have assumed her condemnation and death at the stake implies that her Inquisitors believed the voices were one speak of her experience through a male confessor) her life would have been and the same - after all, an author is usually responsible for the voice

⁸³ Dronke, 222. Dronke also offers the original French on page 275.

⁸⁴ Lambert, 185.

⁸⁵ Lambert, 186; Lerner, 76.

⁸⁶ Lambert, 186; Lerner, 76.

⁸⁷ Lambert, 186.

portrayed within her text. There are several theories that Porete distanced herself from the text through the courtly personification and allegory used in the *Mirror*. But while Porete was charged as a heretic because of her pertinacity and refusal to confess to heresy, her text was condemned years earlier for political and religious reasons. It is important to note that Porete was associated with the voice used in *The Mirror*, as she was condemned as its author and voice of the beliefs expressed in it.

There is no doubt that Porete was outspoken; after her text was burned sometime between 1296 and 1306, she refused to stop spreading her religious views, even after a stern warning from inquisitors. Lerner suggests that she was persecuted because of her persistence and noncompliance with Church leaders after the *Mirror* was burned. "Marguerite was probably a heretic, but had she been submissive and content to enter a cloister, like Mechtild of Magdeburg, with whom she is compared, she probably would have attracted less attention. Her active life, her pertinacity, and the political situation surrounding her arrest certainly contributed to her death."⁸⁸

Certainly, if Porete had complied with her accusers and followed established rules like many mystics had done (e.g. enter a cloister, take traditional vows, speak of her experience through a male confessor) her life would have been spared. Petroff contends:

Her crime, then, was that she insisted on speaking publicly, teaching her ideas publicly, and that she did so in her own voice and that of others like her. She may have been heretical in her views - although

⁸⁸ Petroff, 281.

the very evolved spirituality she is presenting seems no more or less dangerous than the spiritual teachings of Beatrijs or Hadewijch - but she was more visible than they were, for she refused to hide behind God's voice or to submit to the church.⁸⁹

Petroff's belief that she was more "visible" than other orthodox mystics certainly is a valid argument. Petroff's argument that she refused to hide behind the "voice of God" raises an interesting question: what was the voice of Porete, and was it audible through her text? Did her voice as portrayed in the *Mirror* help to condemn her? Or was it the lack of bodiliness and vision experience in her text?

Making Enemies: The Voice of Porete in Her Text

Dronke and Petroff believe that Porete used her own voice as a source of religious authority, and that this was one of the defining characteristics that set her apart from other mystics. However, Hollywood argues that she distanced herself from the text through her use of allegory and personification, arguing that these techniques "create distance between the text and the writer's experience."⁹⁰ She continues, "therefore, while it may be legitimate, given medieval textual conventions, to associate Porete with the voice of the soul, we must keep in mind the distance she intentionally creates between herself and the text..."⁹¹

While Hollywood claims that because Porete implies in her introduction that the *Mirror* is given to the soul by God, that God had "caused

⁸⁹ Petroff, 282.

⁹⁰ Hollywood, 92.

⁹¹ Hollywood, 95.

the book to be written," she relinquishes her responsibility as the voice of the text, "subverting any claim that it is merely the product of her own imagination."⁹² Dronke believes that because Porete is identified as the voice and authority of the text, that she is therefore set apart from other mystics, those who were considered orthodox, and later persecuted. He argues that she writes as herself, whereas Hildegard, a mid-twelfth century mystic, among others, wrote in the name of God:

(Hildegard wrote) in the name of the 'living light' - not in her own. This meant that once her prophetic gift had been officially acknowledged as genuine (the papal sanction, as we saw, was given even before her first work was complete), her utterances were almost beyond challenge. When she spoke out against powerful church authorities, or against Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, it was with prophets impunity. The thirteenth century women speak in their own name.⁹³

Clearly, Porete was held responsible for her *Mirror*. In the book, Porete's understanding of love, the soul, and the Church were expressed in such a way that they (the perceptions) have become to be seen as challenge to the Church and its establishment. Dronke writes, "she laid claim to new perceptions of the divine realm, and of the Church."⁹⁴ But just how radical were her views? Hildegard and many other mystics wrote safely on similar notions of the soul and love, and divine union - some of the mystic's texts were more erotic or more radical. Why, then, was Porete persecuted? As

Dronke believes, she was not merely a voice of God, or a messenger for

⁹² Hollywood, 3.

⁹³ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 203.

⁹⁴ Dronke, 217.

God. As established above, Porete was identified as the voice in the text, and

what is written about in the *Mirror* was seen as the voice of Porete.

Because Porete spoke as a free soul, a liberated spirit, it was her

radical ideas about her religious authority and her brazen assumption that

she could write about a soul that did not need the sacraments or use

traditional church methods to reach God or salvation that got her

condemned. But it was also her lack of social acceptance, as a woman, a

non-traditional mystic, that turned these insights on the annihilated soul into

extreme, radical sentiments.

When discussing the Holy Church the Little, Porete feels free to

"judge" the Little Church in comparison to the Holy Church the Great. Dronke

asserts, "What gives her fabling about the two churches a particular edge of

daring, even hubris, is her sense that the greater church judges and overrides the lesser, which is the empirical Christian assembly on earth."⁹⁵

Porete made enemies within the clergy by acting as their judge and arguing

the soul should never give in to the Little Church. Clerics had reason to be

offended by her claims and assumptions about the Church. Speaking of Holy

Church the Little and in regards to free souls, Porete writes:

...few people know where such souls are, but there must be some, through the just goodness of Love, to uphold the faith of Holy Church...

Oh Holy Trinity, said Faith, Hope and Charity, where are such soaring souls as those of which this book tells? Who are they, what do they do? Teach us this through Lady Love, who knows all things - then those who are shocked at hearing this

⁹⁵ Dronke, 223.

⁹⁶ Dronke, 223. *St. Hildegard: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Eds. John Van Engen and Edward D. English (University of Notre Dame, forthcoming 1997) 287.

book will be pacified. For Holy Church, if she heard it read, all would be amazed at it...

True, said Love, Holy Church the Little would be, she who is governed by Reason; but never Holy Church the Great, who is governed by us...⁹⁶

In Chapter 43 there is a dialogue between Holy Church and Love, where Love asserts that her church (Holy Church the Great) is superior to that to Holy Church (the Little), the earthly church, who agrees:

Love: In truth, Holy Church, says Love, you are inferior to this Holy Church! For such Souls, says Love, are properly called Holy Church, for they support and teach and nurture the whole of Holy Church: not they, says Love, but the whole Trinity through them; and this is true, says Love, let no-one doubt it. O Holy Church, inferior to this Holy Church, say now, says Love, what do you wish to say of these Souls, who are thus commended and praised above you, you who all things act by the advice of Reason?

Holy Church: We wish to say, says Holy Church, that such Souls are in an existence superior to ours, for Love dwells in them and Reason dwells in us; but this existence is not at all in opposition to us, says Holy Church the Less, but rather we commend and praise it for this through the gloss of our writings.⁹⁷

Porete in this dialogue steps on the toes of the Church and its leaders, by insinuating that they are "inferior".

Other passages that were singled out and considered controversial discuss the free soul, a notion that clearly links her to the Free Spirits.

Dronke contends that Porete's assertions that the Soul is freed, that Love takes leave of the virtues, and that the Soul is "annihilated" could be

⁹⁶ Dronke, 223.

⁹⁷ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Eds. John Van Engen and Edward D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, forthcoming 1997) 287.

regarded as polemical. Hollywood explains that Love frees the Soul from all that is associated with material essence - to unite with God, the Soul must let go of desire and free-will, to become completely free. She writes, "Love, in fact, ultimately frees the soul from all desire and servitude, allowing her to become fully united with the divinity."⁹⁸ To know and be united with God, the soul must "annihilate its will and desires". Hollywood continues, "the soul's experience of the ecstasy of love must be surpassed, and the soul must annihilate her will and affections in order to be fully and permanently united with God."⁹⁹ Using Guarnieri's translation of the *Mirror*, Hollywood cites the passage (*The Mirror*, Chapter 122) where the Soul becomes free:

'I used to be shut away in the servitude of captivity,
When desire imprisoned me in the will of affection
There the light of ardor from divine love found me
Who quickly killed my desire, my will and affection,
Which impeded me in the enterprise of the fullness of divine love.'¹⁰⁰

The Soul has been freed, and through its separation from free-will and desire, it can now know true divinity. Hollywood adds that this is "detachment from self-will in which the soul recognizes the absolute presence of the divinity."¹⁰¹

This concept of a free soul was radical. Dronke cites the Soul and Love's leave of the virtues as highly controversial:

A striking instance, and one that especially shocked many churchmen in her day (as the Latin list of thirty censured passages from her work makes plain), is the dramatic scene she invents where the loving soul

⁹⁸ Hollywood, 8.

⁹⁹ Hollywood, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Hollywood, 8. From Chapter 122 of *The Mirror* as translated by Romana Guarnieri.

¹⁰¹ Hollywood, 9.

bids farewell to the virtues. If the soul is wholly caught up in love, then she is all one with God - or Marguerite would equally say, she is annihilated in the divine nothingness. Then the virtues of the Christian spirit seem to that soul like shadowy forms from a past life, forms that can be dismissed, because now they could only disturb the experience of oneness. Thus when Love declares that the soul "can tell the Virtues that she has been a long time and many a day in their service", she replies - and her answer, mounting in intensity as well as calm, turns from speech into song.¹⁰²

The Lack of Bodiliness in the Mirror:

There is another factor that lead to Porete's death - her lack of visions. As established earlier, mystic visions and physical experience were the means by which women gained power and respect through their religiosity - the Church could accept them as truly devout women. It was Porete's lack of traditional female mysticism - the very idea that she does not once mention physical suffering or visions - suggested to Church officials that Porete was not a traditional religious woman, and that perhaps because of this, her ideas served as a greater challenge to the Church.

The mystic tradition was established and accepted by the Church based on visions and physicality understood as female. Porete's text clearly lacks any notion of bodiliness, and therefore, sets her apart from the proverbial mystical tradition. Because of this, Porete is defined as a "pseudo-mulier", or a pseudo woman, this coupled with her dealings with the Church, sets her apart and makes her into a target. Hollywood argues:

Although absent in... Porete, visionary experience, with its odd status between internal and external, subjective and objective,

¹⁰² Dronke, 222.

is central to most women's writings, providing the necessary grounds for authority.¹⁰³

Porete's text, and therefore her authority to write this book, is not based on experiential visions. Hollywood asserts that she talks about "freedom" rather than "action."¹⁰⁴ She adds,

While there are clearly many reasons for Porete's condemnation, reasons both conscious and unconscious to her judges, this factor must have been crucial in their action. The "pseudo-woman", in rejecting culturally defined gender prescriptions, loses all sanction for her public voice. Even if her hearers had accepted her assertions of identification with Love, thereby acknowledging Love as the author of her book, that claim itself would be questionable without the warrant of visionary or ecstatic experience.¹⁰⁵

Porete lacked visions and bodiliness that gave other mystics authority. This gave the Church another reason to see her as a threat. Porete's idea of union with God is purely spiritual, without the mention of bodiliness or the traditional union with God through physical suffering and torment. In Chapter 11, Love and Reason discuss divine understanding and how union is achieved:

Love: The second point is that this Soul is saved by faith without works.

Reason: For God's sake! Says Reason, what can that mean?

Love: This means, says Love, that such an Annihilated Soul possesses so great understanding within her by the virtue of faith, that she is so occupied within herself with the sustenance which Faith administers to her the power of the Father, of the wisdom of the Son, and of the goodness of the Holy Spirit, that a created thing, which passes briefly, cannot dwell in her memory, on account of this other occupation which surrounds the intellect of this Annihilated Soul. This

¹⁰³ Hollywood, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Hollywood, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Hollywood, 202.

Soul no longer knows how to work, and without fail she is thus excused and exonerated, without works, by believing that God is good and incomprehensible. This one is saved by faith without works, because faith surpasses all work, as Love herself witnesses.¹⁰⁶

This chapter reflects a union with God and Love and the Soul, asserting authority and knowledge of this union, but without the established mystical tradition of physical suffering or union. Porete's knowledge of this union is strictly spiritual.

Porete even goes so far as to deny bodiliness,. In Chapter 114, "If the human creature can remain in life and be forever 'without' herself", she surpasses the physical, transcends the physical:

I ask the blind, or the clarified ones, who see better than do the former, if the human creature can remain in life and be forever "without" herself? If these two do not say it to me, no one will say it to me, for no one knows it if one is not of this lineage.

Truth: Truth says yes for her, and Love declares it, who says that the Annihilated Soul is "without" herself when she has no feeling of nature, no work, nor any interior work, neither shame nor honor, nor any fear of anything that might happen, nor any affection in the divine goodness; nor does she know any longer any indwelling of will, but instead [she] is without will at all moments. Thus she is annihilated, "without" herself, whatever thing God might suffer from her. Thus she does all things without herself. This is no marvel: she is no longer "for" her own sake, for she lives by divine substance.¹⁰⁷

Thus Porete describes a Soul that is separated from the virtues, will, human desire, and particularly the physical.

Many women mystics used their bodies to redeem souls and suffer as Christ did for the atonement for others. Porete, however, believes in the

¹⁰⁶ Babibsky, 89.

¹⁰⁷ Babinsky, 185.

salvation of the soul, but writes of it as a purely spiritual notion. In Chapter 117, "How the Soul shows that she is an exemplar of the salvation of every creature", Porete describes salvation in a strictly ethereal sense.

Now speaks the exalted Spirit who is no longer in the dominion of Reason: God has nowhere to place His goodness, it says, if He places it not in me, nor has He a dwelling place which might be appropriate for Him, nor can there be a place where He might completely place Himself, if it is not in me. And through this I am an exemplar of salvation, and even more the salvation itself of every creature and the glory of God.¹⁰⁸

She continues:

[Soul]: Similarly, I tell you, says this Soul, that God the Father has given and poured out in me the totality of His goodness. Such Goodness of God the human race comes to understand by means of my wretchedness. Thus it appears clearly that I am the eternal praise of God and the salvation of the human creature. For the salvation of every creature is nothing other than the understanding of the goodness of God. Thus, since all will have understanding through me of the goodness of God, which goodness of God creates such goodness in me, this goodness will be understood by them through me.¹⁰⁹

Porete defines herself with clear authority as the salvation of all human creatures, without authority established through the physical suffering of contemporary mystics.

Hollywood also claims that because the Soul relieves itself from bodily concerns in the text, that too defies the mystic's identity with Christ through the body and physical means.¹¹⁰ She concludes, "Yet since she was without claims to particular visionary and mystical experiences (sanctioned, of course, as genuine by ecclesiastical leaders), contemporaries saw her as

¹⁰⁸ Babinsky, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Babinsky, 187.

speaking without authority."¹¹¹ Without emphasizing the prescribed mystical belief of union with God through bodily means, Porete is unable to gain authority and her lack of a physical union with the divine leads to her persecution.

CONCLUSION

¹¹⁰ Hollywood, 106.

¹¹¹ Hollywood, 202.

The condemnation of the book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*...

Marguerite Porete's death at the stake in 1310 illustrates the line between orthodox female mysticism and heresy. Porete was a mystic who believed that the soul could be liberated in order to reach a union with God. This notion was considered controversial to Church leaders. However, Porete's beliefs did not single-handedly lead to her persecution. Her independent lifestyle, her association with the beguines, and her lack of a publicly established authority for a female mystic carried her to cross the line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Porete was arrested in 1308 for wandering and preaching. She continued to spread the ideas expressed in her book and was persecuted as heretical years earlier, despite having been declared orthodox. She was declared a relapsed heretic, and her refusal to swear an oath of silence led to her excommunication in 1310. She was turned over to the secular courts, who sentenced her to die at the stake. As a victim of the Inquisition, her death seems to have been the result of her devotion to spiritual ideas which conflicted with Church doctrine. She was a target for Church leaders who were resolute in their decision to eradicate perceived heresy in order to preserve their authority and protect "Christian society." However, there are many more factors which contributed to her death.

The Mirror, written in the courtly love tradition, served as a spiritual handbook, guiding its readers through Seven Stages of Love which led to the desired union with God. By discussing the virtues and dangers of love...

The condemnation of the book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* and Marguerite Porete's death at the stake in 1310 illustrate the fine line between orthodox female mysticism and heresy. Porete was a mystic who preached that the soul could be liberated in order to reach a union with God. This notion was considered controversial to Church leaders. However, Porete's beliefs did not single-handedly lead to her persecution. Her independent lifestyle, her association with the beguines, and her lack of physicality which traditionally established authority for a female mystic caused her to cross the line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Porete was arrested in 1308 for wandering and preaching - she continued to spread the ideas expressed in her book that was condemned as heretical years earlier, despite warnings from Bishop Gui II. She was jailed as a relapsed heretic, and her refusal to swear an oath of absolution led to her excommunication in 1310. She was turned over to the secular courts who sentenced her to die at the stake. As a victim of the Inquisition, her death seems to have been the result of her determination to spread ideas which conflicted with Church doctrine. She was a target for Church leaders who were resolute in their decision to eradicate perceived threats in order to preserve their authority and protect "Christian society." However, there are many more factors which contributed to her death.

The Mirror, written in the courtly love tradition, served as a spiritual handbook, guiding its readers through Seven States of Grace which lead to the desired union with God. By dissolving the will and desires of human

nature, the soul could reach true grace in which it was united with God. This notion not only assumed a great deal of authority, but was seen as highly controversial by Church leaders. In addition, this state of grace could be reached without the mediation of the Church, according to Porete. Thus, Porete is constituted as a threat to Church authority.

Porete was associated with the beguines who were under attack for their independent religious lifestyle. Though they led a life of extreme chastity and spiritual perfection, the beguines lived without formal vows and their movement was not approved by the Church. Because they followed no organized rule, they were a perceived threat to Church leaders. Legislation against the beguines that banned their apostolic lifestyle ushered in a period in which the Church tried to suppress the so-called heretical movement. Because Porete had been called a beguine in her trial records (see Appendix III), she was loosely associated with the beguines and therefore her reputation as a heretic was strengthened. However, despite her association with the beguine movement, it was also the lack of physicality in *The Mirror* that contributed to her persecution.

Female mysticism was a movement that had been accepted by the Church in the later Middle Ages; however, it was structured by Church leaders in an effort to control and restrict the women who had mystical experiences. A female mystic established her authority through bodily suffering - this physicality was a way in which a woman could suffer like Christ. Nonetheless, as a mystic, Porete never established this physicality

and bodiliness both in *The Mirror* and in her lifestyle. Therefore, she did not institute her authority through established methods in which contemporary female mystics gained power. This lack of adherence to traditional female mysticism made Porete a threat to the inquisitors who charged her with heresy, and ultimately led to her death.

Peter Dronke, calls Marguerite Porete "the most neglected of the great writers of the fourteenth century."¹¹² This neglect is due in part to the fact that heretics have been studied separately from orthodox figures and the separation is artificial. Is Porete better understood in the context of an orthodox mystical poet? *The Mirror* is a stunning example of the courtly love poetry of the fourteenth century, while it explores the journey of the Soul and its desire to seek a union with God. The tradition represented by Porete has largely been ignored. The relationship between Porete and female mysticism and the political and religious climate surrounding her death are issues that should be analyzed closely as a whole.

¹¹² Dronke, 202.

APPENDIX I

Chapter 140 of *The Mirror* (The Approval)

I [am] a creature from the creator whose mediation the Creator made this book of Himself for whom I do not know nor do I desire to know, because I ought not to desire this. It is sufficient for me if it is in the secret knowledge of divine wisdom and in hope. I greet them through love of the peace of charity in the highest Trinity, who deems them worthy of direction, by declaring in them the testimony of their life through the record of the clergy who heard this book.

The first of these was a Friar Minor of great fame, life, and sanctity who was called Brother John. This man said about the book, "we commend you through these words of love; therefore receive them with courtesy in love, because love bids you to the honor of God and His free servants and for the profit of those who are not yet this, who however, if it please God, still will be this." That Brother said that this book was truly made by the Holy Spirit, and that if all the clergy of the world heard only what they understood [of it], they would not know how to contradict it in any way. And he asked that it be well guarded for the sake of God and that few see it. And he said that it was so lofty that he himself could not understand it.

Afterward, a Cistercian monk named Dom Franco of the abbey of Villiers saw and read it. He said that he proved through Scripture that truth is what this book speaks.

Afterward, a certain Master of Theology named Godfrey of Fontaines read it. He said nothing unfavorable about the book, as little as the others did. But he did indeed counsel that not many should see it, because, as he said, they could set aside the life to which they were called in aspiring to the one at which they will never arrive. And so in this they could be deceived, because, as he said, the book is made from a spirit so strong and ardent that few or none are found to be like it. Nevertheless, he said, the soul is not able to arrive at divine life or divine practice until she arrives at the practice which this book describes. All other practices are inferior to this, said this Master, they are human practices; this alone is divine practice and nothing other than this.

This approval was made for the sake of the peace of the hearers, and for the sake of your peace as well we tell you about this that this seed might be made fruitful a hundredfold for those who will hear and are worthy.
Amen.¹¹³

¹¹³ Babinsky, 221.

APPENDIX II

Sentence of Marguerite Porete

(Archives nationales de France - J. 428 No. 15)

In Christi nomine amen. Anno ejusdem MCCC decimo, indictione octava, die dominica post Ascensionem Domini (31 Maii), pontificatus beatissimi patris domini C. divina providentia Pape quinti anno quinto, in Gravia Parisius, facta ibidem congregatione sollempni, assistentibus mihi reverendo in Christo patre domino Parisiensi episcopo, magistris Johanne de Frogerio officiali Parisiensi, C. de Chenat, Johanne de Domnomartino, Xaviero de Charmoia, Stephano de Bercandicuria, fratribus Martino de Abbatisvilla bachalario in theologia, Nicolao de Avessiaco ordinis predacatorum, Johanne Marchandi preposito Parisiensi, G. de Choques et pluribus aliis ad hoc specialiter evocatis, presentibus etia, pluribus processionibus ville Parisius et populi multitudine copiosa, et me notario publico infrascripto, religiosus vir et honestus frater G. de Parisius, ordinis predicatorum, inquisitor heretice pravitatis in regno Francie auctoritate apostolica deputatus in scriptis tulit sententias infrascriptas sub hac forma:

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti amen. Quia nobis fratri Guillemo de Parisius ordinis predicatorum inquisitori heretice pravitatis in regno Francie auctoritate apostolica deputato, constat et constitit evidentibus argumentis te, Margaritam de Hannoia dictam Perete, super labe heretice pravitatis vehementer esse suspectam prpter quod citari te fecimus ut compareas in judicio coram nobis, in quo existens personaliter a nobis orata pluries canonice et legitime ut coram nobis juramentum prestares de plena pura et integra veritate dicenda de te et aliis super hiis que ad nobis commissum inquisitionis officium pertinere noscuntur, que facere contempsisti, licet a nobis feuris pluries super hoc et locis pluribus requisita, in hiis fuisti semper contumax et rebellis, pro quibus contumaciis et rebellionibus evidentibus et notoriis hoc exigentibus de multorum pertinorum consilio, in te sic rebellem et contumacem sententiam majoris excommunicationis tulimus et in scriptis, quam, licet te notificata fuisset, post notificationem predictam fere per annum et dimidium in tue salutis dispendium sustinuisti animo pertinaci, licet tibi pluries obtulerimus nos tibi absolutionis impensuros secundum formam ecclesie si hoc humiliter postulares, quod usque nunc petere contempsisti nec jurare nec respondere nobis super premissis hactenus voluisti, propter que secundum sanctiones canonicas pro convicta et confessa, et pro lapsa in heresim seu pro heretica te habemus et habere debemus: Porro dum tu Margarita in istis rebellionibus obstinata maneres, ducti conscientia volentes officii nobis commissi debitum exercere inquisitionem contra te et processum fecimus super predictis, prout exegit ordo vite, ex quibus inquisitione et processu nobis constitit evidenter quondam composuisse te librum pestiferum continentem herisim et errores,

ob quam causam fuit dictus liber per bone memorie Guidonem olim Cameracensem episcopum condemnatus et de mandato ipsius in Valencenis in tua combustus presentia publice et patenter; a quo episcopo tibi fuit sub pena excommunicationis expresse inhibitum ne de cetero talem librum componeres vel haberes aut eo vel simili utereris, addens et expresse ponens dominus episcopus in quadam littera suo sigillata sigillo, quod si de cetero libro utereris predicto vel si ea que continebantur in eo verbo vel scripto de cetero attemptares, te condemnabat tanquam hereticam et relinquebat justiciandam justicie seculari. Post vero dicta omnia dictum librum contra dictam prohibitionem pluries habuisti et pluries usa es, sicut et ejus patet recognitionibus factis nedum coram inquisitore Lotharingie et coram reverendo patre et domino, domino Johanne tunc Cameracensi episcopo, nunc archiepiscopo Senonensi, dictum eundem librum, preter condemnationem et combustionem predictas, sicut bonum et licitum communicasti reverendo patri domino Johanni Cathalonensi episcopo et quibusdam personis aliis, prout ex fidedignorum juratorum et super hiis coram nobis evidentibus testimoniis nobis liquet. Nos igitur super premissis omnibus deliberatione prehabita diligenti communicatoque multorum peritorum in utroque jure consilio, Deum et sancta evangelia pre oculis habentes, de reverendi patris et domini Domini G. Dei gratia Parisiensis episcopo consilio et assensu, te Margaritam non solum sicut lapsam in heresim sed sicut relapsam finaliter condemnamus, et te relinquimus justice seculari, rogantes eam ut citra mortem et membrorum mutilationem, tecum agat misericorditer quantum permittunt canonice sactiones; dictum etiam librum tanquam hereticum et erroneum upote errores et heresim continentem, judicio magistrorum in theologia Parisius existentium et de eorumdem consilio finaliter condemnamus ac denu excommunicari volumus et comburi; universis et singulis habentibus dictum librum precipientes districte et sub pena excommunicationis quod infra instans festum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli nobis vel priori fratrum predicatorum Parisius in Gravia, presente predicto patre reverendo Parisiensi episcopo, clero et populo dicte civitatis ibidem sollempniter congregato, Dominica infra Ascensionem Domini, anno Domini MCCC decimo.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, 577.

APPENDIX III

Consultation of Canon Lawyers On the Case of Marguerite La Porete Held
May 30th, 1310:

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Universis presentes litteras inspecturis, Guillelmus dictus Frater archidiaconus Laudonie in ecclesia Sancti Andree in Scotia, Hugo de Bisuncio canonicus Parisiensis, Johannes de Tollenz canonicus Sancti Quintini in Veromandua, Henricus de Bitunia canonicus Furnensis et Petrus de Vallibus curatus Sancti Germani Altissiodorensis de Parisius, et etiam regentes Parisius in decretis, salutem in actore salutis. Noveritis virum venerabilem devotum et discretum fratrem Guillelmum de Parisius ordinis predicatorum inquisitorem heretice pravitatis in regno Francie auctoritate sedis apostolice deputatum, inque processum qui sequitur nobis intimasse, consultationemque nobis fecisse inferius annotatam. Processus equidem talis est: Tempore quo Margarita dicta Porete suspecta de heresi fuit in rebellione et in inobedientia, nolens respondere nec jurare coram inquisitore de hiis que ad inquisitionis sibi commisse officium pertinent, ipse inquisitor contra eam nihilominus inquisivit et etiam depositione plurium testium invenit quod dicta Margarita librum quemdam composuerat continentem hereses et errores qui de mandato reverendi patris domini Guidonis condam Cameracensis episcopi publice et sollempniter tanquam talis fuit condemnatus et combustus et per litteram dicti episcopi fuit ordinatum quod si talia sicut ea que continebatur in libro de cetero attemptaret verbo vel scripto eam condemnabat et relinquebat justiciandam justicie seculari. Invenit etiam idem inquisitor quod ipsa recognovit in judicio semel coram inquisitore Lotharingie et semel coram reverendo patre Domino Phillippo tunc Cameracensi episcopo, se post condemnationem predictam librum dictum habuisse et alios: invenit etiam idem inquisitor quod dicta Margarita dictum librum in suo consimili eosdem continentem errores post ipsius libri condemnationem reverendo patri Domino Jo. Dei gratia Cathalaunensi episcopo communicavit ac nedum dicto domino sed et pluribus aliis personis simplicibus, begardis et aliis tanquam bonum. Consulatio autem ex predictis resultans per prefatum inquisitorem ut pertactum est nobis facta talis est: Videlicet, utrum in talibus dicta beguina debeat relapsa judicari? Nos autem fidei catholice zelatores, veritatisque canonice professores qualescumque consultationi predicte respondentes, dicimus quod ipsa beguina, supposita veritate facti precedentis, judicanda est relapsa et merito relinquenda est curie seculari. In cujus rei testimonium sigilla nostra presentibus apposuimus. Datum anno Domini MCCC decimo sabbato post festum beati Johannis ante portam latinam.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, 578.

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