

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES: THE
TRANSFORMATION OF A BIBLICAL CONCEPT
INTO AN INQUISITORIAL TECHNIQUE

by

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I: HERESY, INQUISITION, AND THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

The name inquisition tends to conjure an image of stern churchmen subjecting tortures upon the laypeople of medieval Europe, uncaring in their judgements and zealous in their administering of punishments. Reality, however, was quite different, as many inquisitors, although incredibly pious and zealous in their Christian faith, sought not to burn all heretics at the stake and thoroughly torture the masses. Instead, they found themselves grappling with beliefs and ideas that questioned the very fundamentals of their own Christian doctrines and had to learn to navigate the convoluted, tumultuous period of the High Middle Ages while developing new legal and ecclesiastical techniques for maintaining the Christian faith in Europe. The Discernment of Spirits was one such technique, with its basis in biblical ideas as old as St. Paul; it however soon found new use as an inquisitorial tool.

Originally a method used by Christians to determine whether ideas, people, beliefs, and influences they were exposed to were in line with their faith, the technique took on new use under the inquisition. The early Christian saints defined discernment as a careful individual testing of the claims of new prophets, to ensure that one remained under the growing authority of the early Church. One needed to beware the possibility of false prophets, of the influences of evil spirits, and carefully interpret claims in accord with scripture. However, despite calling for the laity to practice discernment, no formal instructions were provided by men such as St. Paul. With the development of the inquisition in the High Middle Ages though, discernment changed. What had once been a voluntary personal expression of faith now became a forced method of possible

persecution.¹ The development and application of the Discernment of Spirits demonstrated the difficulties inquisitors faced when trying to sort matters of faith with logic, as well as how common sentiments and attitudes of the time could affect such efforts. Although the inquisition developed many techniques for combatting heresy, the Discernment of Spirits found increasing use throughout the High Middle Ages due to the growing number of self-proclaimed mystics, many of whom did not discern their own spirits. Furthermore, the laity seemed to practice personal discernment less and less, and bought into the claims of new prophets, alarming the Church. While inquisitors understood new prophets were within the realm of possibility, they also knew false prophets were just as likely, and thus to protect the laity, the spirits of these prophets needed to be discerned. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the development of the inquisition by exploring the causes for its creation, and how the Discernment of Spirits evolved into an inquisitorial method for combating heresy.

Languedoc and the Development of Defined Heresy

First, while it is common to imagine the inquisition as an official, structured organization, in reality this was not the case. Mainly born from growing problems with alternative unsanctioned beliefs common amongst the populace, the inquisition started as a means for theologians to combat heresies throughout Europe. While it would eventually gain a bit more structure upon being outsourced to several monastic orders, it was never an official, fully organized arm of the Church. Nevertheless, this did not prevent

¹ Harvey D. Egan, Forward to *Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living*, by Timothy M. Gallagher, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 19-27; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3-5.

theologians and monastic inquisitors from attempting to codify, organize, and commit to writing their practices and experiences, in the hopes of aiding their future battles against heresy.²

However, for there to be an inquisition, there needed to be heresy. While early on in the Middle Ages the Church felt that heresy was best combated with oral persuasion, this mentality eventually changed. Due to the common illiteracy of the laypeople at the time the Church recognized that false and misguided beliefs, at least by their doctrinal standards, were normal. Thus, the concern over heresy was less about mistaken beliefs, and more about the individual who refused to rescind such beliefs, or actively promoted them, despite warnings, imprisonment, or other punishment from the Church. And for the social elite and governments, simply allowing heresy to occur unchallenged made one a heretic as well. Such was the case in the French province of Languedoc, which in many ways was the area responsible for the formation of the inquisition and by extension, the development and use of the technique of Discernment of Spirits.³

Not until the High Middle Ages though did heresy become a canonical judicial category. Beginning around the time of the Albigensian Crusades (1209-1229) in the province of Languedoc, the Church took greater concern with heresy. This was due to the so-called “heretical” dualists of the area, known as Cathars by outsiders, whose beliefs were a departure from those espoused by the Church. The Cathars called themselves by names such as Good Christians or Friends of God, as Cathar was the term used by their opponents, particularly theologians and inquisitors. The Cathars subscribed to a dualist

² Henry Ansgar Kelly, “Inquisition and the Prosecution of Heresy: Misconceptions and Abuses,” *Church History*, Vol. 58, No. 4., (Dec., 1989), 439-440.

³ Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 4-15, 36-37, 53, 87-88

belief that separated the material and spiritual world, finding that the evil present in the material world could not be God's doing, as the Bible did not portray God as evil.

However, while their beliefs were rooted in biblical ideas, they denied the essential goodness of the God of Genesis who created the material world, and as such the Cathars soon found themselves in conflict with the Church.⁴

Even though the Church expressly condemned dualist beliefs and the Cathars, dealing with them proved to be no easy matter. For starters, Cathars were prominent in the mountainous rural region of Languedoc, a territory regularly prone to lawless activity and itinerant mercenaries. The area also answered more readily to its local lords rather than the French monarchy, and most of these local leaders in turn provided protection for the Good Christians and others. Thus the region was relatively religiously tolerant, and even much of the local clergy did little to interfere with the resident heretics.⁵ The lackadaisical clerical attitude began to change though, first in 1179 with the Third Lateran Council, and again in 1184, when Pope Lucius III issued the Papal Decree *Ad abolendam*. Both the Council and decree laid out parameters intended for use by bishops when dealing with heresy, particularly the Cathars. Although the parameters laid out were not aggressive in any real sense, they brought heresy to the fore of papal issues and laid the groundwork for the next pope, Pope Innocent III, to begin his attacks on heresy, especially against the Cathars of Languedoc.⁶

⁴ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 25-36, 88-89.

⁵ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 36-40.

⁶ *Third Lateran Council* (1179), ed. Paul Halsall (1996), in the Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project, www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/LATERAN3.HTM; Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 50, 89.

Innocent III began directly combating heresy around 1198, with a letter to the Archbishop of Auch and declarations to his own Church subordinates.⁷ Innocent called for rigorous attacks on heresy present in places such as Gascony, even stating that, "...if necessary, you may cause the princes and people to suppress them with the sword."⁸ The following year, 1199, Innocent continued his attack with the Papal Bull *Vergentis in senium* (Inclining Towards Decay), directed at churchmen. This Bull decreed that if a churchman was guilty of committing or permitting heresy, that individual would be stripped of his office, and lose any economic benefits that came with the position. Innocent III essentially equated heresy with conspiracy, deeming it treason against God, and thus the punishment for such actions should be severe, as with regular treason.⁹ For the relatively lax clergymen of Languedoc, such a decree could easily change their minds, as it jeopardized their livelihood. While this did not necessarily mean the Cathars would listen to the clergy, it did remove a layer of protection from the Church's future actions.

While Innocent III realized that most heresy was not intentional, he also recognized that some heretics were unwilling to change their ways, especially the Cathars, as indicated by the lack of influence of the Church in Languedoc. Concluding that oral persuasion and conversion efforts were not working, Innocent III initiated what became known as the Albigensian Crusade in 1209. Despite reforms within the Church, the local clergy were unable to persuade the Cathars, who enjoyed local political support

⁷ Innocent III to the Archbishop of Auch in Gascony, 1198, *A Source Book for Mediaeval History: Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Age*, ed. Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), section 116, ebook, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2277>; Innocent III Commands all in Authority to Aid His Legates in Destroying Heresy, 1198, *Source Book for Mediaeval History*, section 117.

⁸ Innocent III to the Archbishop of Auch in Gascony, 1198, *Source Book for Mediaeval History*, section 116.

⁹ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 89.

of the heretical nature of their beliefs. Therefore, finding no assistance from local lords and government officials, such as Raymond VI of Toulouse, Innocent III proceeded to charge many as heretics as one aspect of the Crusade.¹⁰ Then, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Innocent III increased the attack on heretics and strengthened the Church legally by producing 70 new canons, many of which dealt with heresy and included specific punishments for those deemed heretical. In addition, Innocent III made it mandatory that all Christians attend confession and receive communion at least once a year, at Easter. Such a requirement would later be beneficial to the inquisition, since annually they would be acquiring knowledge of local beliefs, including any erroneous ones. Then, the inquisition or local clergy had an opportunity to stop such ideas before they grew in scope and influence, and in some cases, even determine where such beliefs might have originated from.¹¹ In many ways, this practice would set a precedent for how best to inquire into spiritual matters, and how to keep tabs on potential problems.

Around this same time, Innocent III converted the Franciscans and Dominicans into recognized religious orders, a decision that would later have a major influence on the inquisition. This decision provided the members of these orders with an official position within the church allowing them to become inquisitors. The decision also indicated the church's approval of the kind of life choices, practices, and beliefs of the Orders in comparison to the practices and beliefs deemed heretical.¹² However, such a decision could also backfire, as many attempting to present themselves as pious or zealous adherents to Church teachings might model themselves upon such Orders, only to find

¹⁰ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 37, 50, 88-89.

¹¹ *Fourth Lateran Council* (1215), ed. Halsall, Fordham University, www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/LATERAN4.HTM.

¹² Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 92-95.

themselves in a heresy trial. Such a problem was especially common with pious women, as Marguerite Porete's trial will show. Overall though, Innocent III made little headway in the Albigensian Crusade, and it was not until Pope Gregory IX, a canon lawyer, ascended to the papacy that the Crusade was abandoned for a different approach- one that would evolve into the inquisition.¹³

The Beginnings of the Inquisition

The inquisition did not develop quickly, but Gregory IX began setting it in motion soon after the French monarchy decided to stop the Albigensian Crusade with the Treaty of Paris in 1229. In November of that year Gregory convened the Council of Toulouse, mainly to address the issue of the heresy still very much present in Languedoc. Eighteen canons of those issued from this council dealt with heresy, many specifically concerned the Cathars. In addition, Gregory allowed for laypeople with good reputations to assist their local priests in searching the homes and meeting places, and occasionally even the person, of those suspected of heresy. As punishment, convicted heretics were required to bear markings on their clothing indicating them as such, and some were even forced to relocate to new towns. Furthermore, possession of any kind of scripture or theological writings by laypeople, especially in Languedoc, was expressly prohibited. This attack on spiritual writings and those possessing them would become a common theme throughout the inquisition's tenure, as will be seen with the trial of Marguerite of Porete.¹⁴

Having little success using local priests and their laypeople deputies as prototype inquisitors, Gregory IX appointed the priest Conrad of Marburg and Dominican friar

¹³ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 95.

¹⁴ The Council of Toulouse, 1229, in *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*, Edward Peters, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 195-196.

Robert le Bougre to investigate heresy in Germany and France. However, this did not go too well, as both of the men went far overboard in their “investigations.” The result of these investigations was numerous false accusations, massive numbers of executions by burning- particularly on the part of le Bougre- and over-exaggerated claims of devil worshipping. Eventually Conrad was murdered and le Bougre suspended from duty, Gregory decided to find a better method, and better people, for conducting such investigations.¹⁵ While their work was judged a total failure, these first inquisitors still represented Gregory IX’s new line of thought in regard to ending heresy. Instead of violent wars or ineffective preaching, the Church would take the time to seriously investigate heresy, even if it meant interrogating one person at a time.

Around the same time as the nightmare that was Conrad and le Bougre was occurring, Gregory IX was also making changes to the Church’s legal system, and these changes would be far more effective for the inquisition than the efforts of the two proto-inquisitors. Formerly, the courts had utilized a process known as *accusatio* (accusatorial procedure) throughout much of the Middle Ages, however, Innocent III had started a process continued by Gregory IX, in reviving the ancient Roman practice of *inquisitio* (inquiry), for trials. Gregory IX particularly began having this practice applied to heresy trials, and soon found a good deal of success. The earlier method of *accusatio* was based upon the accuser charging the accused in a court, and the court utilizing “judicial ordeals” to determine innocence or guilt. The ordeals involved the use of methods ranging from near drowning to deciding if burns applied to the victim healed too fast, however many verdicts were actually based on the community’s attitude towards the accused. Were they well known and well liked, or were they outsiders, suspicious, or cruel? *Inquisitio*,

¹⁵ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 97-98.

however, took the community attitude and used it in a far more effective method, as those inquiring relied on the community to tell them all about a person. Instead of dunking people in rivers, they were now brought in for heavy questioning about all aspects of their spiritual life and beliefs, as were their neighbors, family, and friends. Only eyewitness evidence or a confession could convict someone of guilt in this scenario. Thus the inquisition was born.¹⁶

Not long after Conrad of Marburg's attempt at investigation on behalf of the papacy went downhill, Gregory IX decided to put religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans in charge of the *inquisitio* judiciaries. He began establishing ad hoc tribunals specifically run by specially trained judge-inquisitors, the first being in Carcassonne in 1237. Such specially appointed tribunals soon appeared throughout Europe, and the orders, particularly the Dominicans, began to standardize their training for positions within these tribunals.¹⁷ In addition, while these tribunals were not part of a large, homogenous entity that was interconnected, they did have many features in common, and similar status, within the papacy. First, inquisitors only answered to the pope, and thus were outside of the Church's normal hierarchy, which meant they did not have to answer to local clergymen. If they felt they needed to do something, they only required the pope's sanction. They were also allowed to go after suspects, as well as obtain depositions from people that canon law normally did not allow to give testimonies, including children. They also did not tell the accused who was testifying against them.¹⁸

¹⁶ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 98-100. Kelly, *Prosecution of Heresy*, 441-443. Anonymous of Arras, "A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics (Witches) (1460)," in *The Arras Witch Treatises*, ed. Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins, and François V. Pageau, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 27-35

¹⁷ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 100-101

¹⁸ Kelly, "Prosecution of Heresy", 442-446.

Yet the method of *inquisitio*, while proving far more effective than bloody crusades, still possessed difficulties. Most notably, it was not necessarily easy to untangle spiritual fact from fiction with such a method, and most inquisitors were working as outsiders in cities, regions, and even countries. Thus, unfamiliar with locals, their beliefs, customs, history, and local churchmen, it was not always easy to navigate the answers being given during inquiries. Therefore, many took it upon themselves to help each other by committing to writing their experiences, methods, successes, and sometimes even failures. In this manner, the inquisitors began to develop actual techniques and standard practices for use throughout most of Western Europe.¹⁹

One of the earliest inquisitors to write down his techniques was Bernard Gui, a Dominican and prominent theologian of the period. He is credited with over 500 inquisitional judgements, and the experience he gained making them was channeled into his manual, *Practica officii Inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* (*Conduct of the Inquisition into Heretical Wickedness*), generally agreed to have been written sometime around 1323. Within his manual Gui covered a variety of the heresies he faced throughout his career, and the methods he developed for dealing with the Cathars, and another group that was fast gaining popularity-- the beguines.²⁰

One of the key aspects of Gui's manual is his acknowledgement that the inquisition had no overarching method for dealing with all heretics and instead had to develop different techniques for different types of heresies. Gui himself addressed the heresies of the, "Manicheans, the Waldensians or the Poor of Lyon, the False Apostles, those commonly known as Beguines, and Jewish converts to the faith of Christ," and

¹⁹ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 100-103.

²⁰ Bernard Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide: A Medieval Manual on Heretics*, translated and edited by Janet Shirley, (Welwyn Garden City, United Kingdom: Ravenhall Books, 2006), 7-15.

also, “sorcerers, fortune-tellers and those who invoke demons.”²¹ Although not directly addressing Discernment of Spirits as a technique, Gui emphasized the discernment of the inquisitor, essentially the ability to determine how best to proceed with interrogations. Gui’s description of the inquisitor as a, “prudent physician of souls,” is quite similar to the Discernment of Spirits with both calling for a careful consideration of the heretic’s spiritual self.²² Such a method was a kind of prototype for the inquisition’s later usage and development of the actual Discernment of Spirits.

Beguines, Female Spiritualists, and the Discernment of Spirits

Predominately a female group, the beguines associated themselves with saints such as Francis, and famous religious figures such as Hildegard of Bingen. They attempted to live rigorously spiritual lives, with the term generally meaning, “...an unmarried laywoman leading a devout religious life in the world.”²³ However, the Church did not sanction them, and they rejected proper Church hierarchy. While they acted as if they were an approved order, some even claiming to actually belong to the Franciscans, their practices indicated otherwise. Some, such as Marguerite Porete, wrote their own spiritual treatises, and as we shall see, the Church viewed this as spreading their heresy and corrupting other laypeople. Most of these works were written in common vernacular, making them easily read by literate laypeople. The treatises addressed spiritual topics such as the soul and what the authors deemed good Christian practices, and how such practices affected the soul. They also tended to phrase things with an emphasis on love,

²¹ Gui, *Inquisitor’s Guide*, 32.

²² Gui, *Inquisitor’s Guide*, 31.

²³ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 30.

in many ways having love exemplify the ultimate in spiritual attainment.²⁴ While Hildegard of Bingen had believed that women would soon gain prominence as exemplary Christians and powerful spiritualists, this rise in female spiritualism happened to coincide with the growing power of the inquisition. Thus, as more and more women turned to spiritual callings, especially as beguines and the like, they soon found themselves at the mercy of the inquisitors.²⁵

Overall, beguines posed a rather difficult situation. Many tried to model themselves after St. Francis' teachings; however they lacked the structure found in the Franciscan orders. There was no real requirement to become a beguine, and one did not have to remain a beguine, unlike vowed nuns. In addition, as many beguines were women, they tended to be relatively illiterate. Despite this lack of education, some claimed great spiritual knowledge and understanding, which concerned many churchmen. After all, without undergoing proper clerical training, how did they obtain such knowledge? Was their spiritual knowledge perhaps from diabolical sources? Such a concern was becoming increasingly common, as more and more women took on spiritual roles and claimed mystical powers.²⁶

It was with female spiritualists as well that a specific kind of inquisitorial method found increasingly prominent use, whether the culprits were beguines or not. Termed Discernment of Spirits, this practice had a long history within the Church, but the inquisition developed it into a formal method with a very specific use. Originally intended for personal use in determining the nature of claims made by self-proclaimed

²⁴ Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 96-97; Field, *The Beguine*, 1-10; David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001)198-200.

²⁵ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14-19.

²⁶ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 153, 158-167; Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 96-97; Field, *The Beguine*, 1-12.

prophets, discernment called for careful examination to ensure ideas adhered to Church doctrine. However, quasi-religious women such as beguines were claiming a new kind of spiritual occurrence, and it posed a difficult task for inquisitors such as Gui to deal with. As the years wore on and spirituality grew, a number of individuals, particularly women, came forward claiming to hear the voice of God or other divine beings speaking to them. These individuals claimed that these voices offered spiritual and eventually, as in the case of Joan of Arc, even political and military advice. Divine voices were a relatively new concept with little Church history, which forced inquisitors to have to develop new definitions for what constituted the divine.²⁷

Divine or Diabolical?

For the Church, the response to demonic voices, possessions, and other such experiences of evil had a basis in scripture, as will be seen with Ermine de Reims and Joan of Arc.²⁸ This was not necessarily the case with godly experiences such as divine voices. To make matters more complicated, the writings that addressed divine and demonic forces and their influences on mortals all indicated that the two were essentially similar, and there were little means to truly distinguish between the two. Naturally, according to typical clerical thinking a demonic entity would try to present itself as a divine one to fool the individual who experienced the voice and to lead them astray. And most churchmen imagined that demons were far cleverer than average laypeople, who were thought to be easily led astray in their comprehension of Christian doctrine. Furthermore, the physical signs displayed by those who were claiming divine possession

²⁷ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 154, 180; Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 96-97; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 12, 31-36, 75.

²⁸ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 3.

or inspiration tended to mirror those displayed by demonic possession, with the victims of either mostly looking like they were out of their mind.²⁹

The knowledge that was claimed to come from such entities was also a problem. Churchmen believed demons to be clever in their endeavors, as Joan of Arc's case will display. Relying on their higher spiritual knowledge, these demons could trick those with less knowledge into falling into heretical beliefs.³⁰ Furthermore, according to some theologians, demons also did not always lie, as indicated by writings as far back as the eighth century, when St. John of Damascus wrote about the difficulties presented by angels and devils in regards to prophecy. In *De fide orthodoxa*, he states, "In the case of the angels, God lifts the veil for them and tells them to predict, and so whatever they say actually happens. The demons, too, predict- sometimes they see things happening a long way off, sometimes they guess. In consequence, for the most part they lie and one should not put any trust in them. On a number of occasions, however, they tell the truth."³¹ Even as late as the first witch trials, demons and angels were viewed as nearly equal in power, able to do everything from conjure storms to casting illusions.³² Thus, for those attempting to discern between the two powers, there was very little to go upon, and much of what was written only made the situations at hand more complicated.

Furthermore, the longevity of demonic possession as a tangible reality in the Church had negative implications for those claiming divine possession and assistance. For one, this made public reaction to any proclaimed divine causes more skeptical. To the

²⁹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 24, 75.

³⁰ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 24, 33, 75.

³¹ St. John of Damascus, "De fide orthodoxa," in *The Occult in Medieval Europe, 500-1500: A Documentary History*, ed. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 42.

³² Johannes Tinctor, "Invectives Against the Sect of Waldensians (Witches) (1460)," in *The Arras Witch Treatises*, ed. Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins, and François V. Pageau (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016) 125-142.

common layperson, if someone was acting in ways historically associated with demonic possession, a good Christian would find difficulty in believing that such actions had a divine origin. These preconceptions could negatively affect an inquisition trial, since part of the inquiry process involved speaking with friends, family and neighbors. If several laypeople ascribed the actions of the accused to demonic possession, something they were familiar with, instead of divine possession, still a relatively new concept, this could easily convince an inquisitor of heresy.³³

For the mostly illiterate laypeople of the Middle Ages, demonic possession, being discussed in scripture, also meant they were more likely to hear about it from their parish priests. Divine inspiration, on the other hand, would be more commonly discussed in theological texts unfamiliar to laypeople. Thus the similarities between the two would be even more difficult to distinguish for them, further clouding their judgement. In addition, such subtle differences worked in reverse as well. It would be easier for malevolent entities to trick the unwary, as those unfamiliar with theological texts might not realize that sometimes demons were believed to tell the truth. Therefore if a proclaimed mystic was prophesizing events that came to pass, laypeople might easily believe such prophecies were due to divine forces, when in reality there was just as likely a chance they would be demonic. To discern spirits in the manner the inquisition sought required a strong familiarity with not only scripture, but with hundreds of years' worth of theological texts as well. And even then, there was still no clear way established to discern between good or evil spirits.³⁴

³³ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 31-37, 75-78

³⁴ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 31-37, 75-78.

The Avignon Papacy and the Discernment of Spirits

Thus, for inquisitors, their task was daunting. They had to navigate inquiries amongst a generally unlearned populace about deeply spiritual matters for which they did not have very good precedents. So how could they better their situation? For many inquisitors, a university training was a common element of their upbringing, and because of this, they were more than simple clerics, they were also theologians, and it was to their fellow theologians they turned to determine how best to discern spirits. As we have seen, there was certainly information to be found in prior Christian writings, and inquisitors were increasingly able to turn to a growing body of work penned by their contemporaries that started with and then elaborated on that heritage. The popularity of this type of work was fueled by the growing number of cases involving spiritualists and mystics, many of whom were claiming divine inspiration, and many of whom were women.³⁵

Indeed, Hildegard of Bingen claimed in the twelfth century that the Christian world was entering a so-called effeminate age, which would witness the rise of female spiritual leaders, while male leadership declined.³⁶ Such a claim seemed to be the case in the years leading up to the Western Great Schism, which would occur in 1378 after the papacy moved itself back to Rome from Avignon. While male popes and cardinals spent their time fighting kings over who controlled whom, they left a void in spiritual leadership, which was very noticeable amongst the populace. Unable to rely upon Church leaders who could not even decide where to lead from, laypeople found themselves increasingly turning to others to assist with their spiritual needs. In stepped numerous

³⁵ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 100-103; Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide*, 13-14; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 33, 284, 315.

³⁶ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14-19, 274-276.

women, several of whom not only provided spiritual guidance but also criticized the Church for not doing so.³⁷

One such female mystic was Brigit of Sweden, a queen who preached and prophesized about the papacy in Avignon and its weakened situation. Pushing to have it moved back to Rome, Brigit spent her later years preaching against three different popes in the hopes of convincing them of her cause. She entered trances during which God would speak to her and claimed that there were strange movements within her heart from where she had incorporated Christ into herself. Many believed her prophecies would come to pass, such as predicting the death for Pope Urban V when he only returned the papacy to Rome for a few years, and who upon returning to Avignon grew ill and died.³⁸ Though she was eventually canonized, it would ultimately take three different canonizations over the years because she was such a controversial figure. Theologians such as Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) and Jean Gerson (1363-1429) decried her sainthood, with Gerson penning *De probatione spirituum* (On the Testing of Spirits) in 1415 as a response to it. Much of the discontent hinged around the nature of her prophecies, and whether they were divine or demonic in nature. That demons could speak the truth in regards to prophecies just like angels has already been established, so the fact that events Brigit prophesized came true offers little help in discerning the nature of her spirits. Instead, many tried to discern the very nature of the things she prophesized. Although she preached for the Church to return to Rome, and it ultimately did, this would result in the Great Schism, which was a rather negative event. Thus, while moving the papacy back to

³⁷ Barbara Obrist, "The Swedish Visionary: Saint Bridget," in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984)227-230; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14-19, 274-278.

³⁸ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 277-280.

Rome might seem like a noble cause on the surface, indicating a divine nature, the results of such a move indicated quite the opposite. In fact, the resulting Great Schism weakened and confused the Church and its followers, such as Ermine de Reims, so greatly that such an event was easily seen as the work of demons. Gerson, for one, thought the devil inspired her and that the Church had been foolish to permit her following to grow so large. In addition, Brigit discussing foreign entities being inside any part of her body had a lot in common with typical descriptions of demonic possession, as demons entered into the body, usually through the mouth, and resided inside a person. To make matters worse, she had actually questioned herself several times about the nature of her spirits and prophecies, including the foreign movements inside her body. While she and her supporters ultimately decided it was a divine entity, Churchmen familiar with demonic possession cases would have undoubtedly been far more skeptical.³⁹

Brigit is a good early example of how difficult it was to discern spirits. Although she never went before the inquisition, her life displays the complexities of trying to determine the nature of beings whose existence was rooted firmly in a faith. While one could describe the physical ailments and occurrences brought about by something like demonic possession, there was little way to actually prove such physical results were the work of demons. Thus, while Brigit and her supporters could claim there was a foreign entity inside of her, that some of them could even see it, proving the nature of something like that would be impossible through physical means. Therefore, one would have to rely purely on analysis and placing things within the greater theological discourse to

³⁹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 36-78, 278-280. Obrist, "Saint Bridget," 232-237.

determine the nature of the spirits affecting a person. And unfortunately for Brigit, a good deal of the discourse was against her.⁴⁰

However, Brigit was not the only female spiritual leader to demand the papacy move back to Rome. Pope Gregory XI, successor to Urban V, soon found himself dealing with an even more fervent mystic, Catherine of Siena. Claiming to be possessed by God and spiritually married to Jesus, Catherine was an intense figure who caused an uproar within the papal offices in Avignon for daring to repeatedly visit the pope and insist he return to Rome. In addition, Catherine's behavior was extreme, and she was investigated for demonic possession in 1374. Prone to trances, weeping, severe fasting (she would ultimately even die of self-inflicted starvation), and claiming to regularly be harassed by demons, she displayed many behaviors generally viewed as being signs of demonic possession. She also claimed to bear both the stigmata of Christ and his wedding band upon her body, but that only she could see the stigmata and the band.⁴¹

Naturally, if Brigit was a controversial figure, Catherine was even more so, her reputation enhanced by the fact that many believed that she had convinced Pope Gregory XI to move the papacy back to Rome. As Gregory would die not long after returning to Rome, and the Great Schism immediately followed, many detractors viewed this as proof of demonic possession. The fact that Catherine would live another two years after the Schism did not help her reputation either. Coupled with her extreme actions, such claims made sense for a lay populace that was more familiar with the signs of demonic possession. The spiritual turmoil brought by the Great Schism seemed to confirm that Catherine's actions and the resulting chaos resulted from demonic possession.

⁴⁰ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 278-280, 289.

⁴¹ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 280-281.

Furthermore, unlike Brigit who had died shortly before the papacy returned to Rome, Catherine was still alive to see the result. For those who might think she was possessed by a demon, she seemed satisfied with the fruits of its labors. Nevertheless, Catherine did have the benefit of being part of the Dominican order, as a tertiary member, and this would help her reputation and her sanctity, both during and after her life. As will be seen with Ermine de Reims, having clerical support tended to result in a more positive reaction to discernment cases. Thus, while her detractors could make a persuasive argument regarding the nature of her spirits, the Dominican determination to preserve the order's stature benefited her reputation, and ultimately led to her canonization. The Dominican order had examined her for demonic possession in 1374, so it argued that the investigation had discerned that her spirits were divine. Tellingly, the theologians writing during the Schism clearly demonstrated a bias toward Catherine that had less to do with her spirits than with the fact she was a woman who had successfully convinced a pope to return to Rome.⁴² After all, such a result could be proof of Hildegard of Bingen's effeminate age, a possibility that disturbed theologians who adopted attitudes toward the Discernment of Spirits in response to their attitude toward female mystics.

Theologians Address the Discernment of Spirits

Perhaps in part because of the volatile religious climate, some of the most useful theological texts for inquisitors regarding Discernment of Spirits came about during the Great Schism. While government officials and popes fought for political and social power over each other and a divided papacy was spread around Europe, Church

⁴² Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 280-284.

theologians sought to solve the troubled spiritual climate as best they could. While many women found themselves taking on vital spiritual roles as mystic prophetesses, several men, believing Hildegard's effeminate age to be on the horizon, sought better spiritual guidance for their Christian brethren. These men applied their vast theological knowledge to the turmoil of the time and penned numerous treatises, several of which dealt with the Discernment of Spirits.⁴³

By the mid-fourteenth century, where we begin our case studies of three remarkable women, the issue of spiritual discernment became an important theological issue. Three connected theologians in particular turned their attention to the issue of the Discernment of Spirits, starting in 1383. That year Henry of Langenstein (1325-1397), a theology professor, wrote *On the Discernment of Spirits*. In this work, Henry discussed the turmoil of the schism as being caused by the deceit of false saints, particularly female ones, and their assumption of leadership positions. Henry's claims seemed directed at women such as Brigit of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. He also found their mysticism troubling, addressing the discernment issue, and stating that churchmen needed to be more discerning in regards to mystics. Henry was not fond of Hildegard of Bingen either, yet he agreed with her prediction of a rise in female spiritual power. However, unlike Hildegard, he did not view it in a positive light, and felt her idea of the "effeminate age" accurately described the troubled times. He viewed the Church as being in a weak and womanly state, prone to foolishness and manipulation. He even believed this state was a lead-in to the coming of the Antichrist.⁴⁴

⁴³ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 284-291.

⁴⁴ Joseph Reese Strayer, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 6, (New York, NY: Scribner, 1982), 166-167. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 284-287.

Following in Henry's footsteps, Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) discussed false saints as being possible bringers of the Apocalypse, in his treatise *On False Prophets*. By pretending to be imbued with divine powers and claiming to spread divine ideas, false prophets could sow dissension, such as the Great Schism, easily and convincingly. Presenting themselves as incredibly pious and spiritually superior, false prophets could trick unwary laypeople by enacting devout practices and events, even faking miracles. Discerning between divine and demonic entities and how they affected people was already difficult, but to blindly follow anyone who seemed to display spiritual abilities of any sort was especially foolish. Thus, d'Ailly believed that it was imperative to be able to differentiate between false and real prophets, to effectively discern spirits. One needed to carefully study the prophets themselves to determine the nature of their spirits. D'Ailly's ideas tied directly into the claims first made by Henry of Langenstein, warning churchmen to be careful regarding their choice of spiritual leaders.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most well-known of the three Schism-era writers, d'Ailly's student Jean Gerson (1363-1429) wrote numerous treatises and tracts on a variety of spiritual matters, and several of them were devoted to the Discernment of Spirits. Gerson, much like his predecessors, was especially concerned with the prominence of women in spiritual matters, and wrote treatises such as *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations* (1402) and *On the Testing of Spirits* (1415) in direct response to popular female mystics, such as Brigit.⁴⁶ Indeed, he viewed many of the sanctimonious actions of prophets, spiritualists, and mystics as overwhelmingly feminine in nature, much like

⁴⁵ Charles Dubray, "Pierre d'Ailly," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 1. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) accessed 5 Mar. 2018. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 287-289.

⁴⁶ Deborah A. Fraioli, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*, (Rochester, New York: The Boydell Press, 2000), 10-14; Jean Gerson, "On Distinguishing True from False Revelations," in *Early Works*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998) 334; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 289.

Henry of Langenstein originally described. For Gerson, such prophesizing and spiritual pretensions were a result of illiterate laywomen with foolish ideas who could not keep themselves in check. Furthermore, he believed that much of the discernment that needed to be happening was for determining that spiritual women were being foolish and falsely pious in the hopes of attention, and that too many laypeople were giving them such attention easily. False piety and gullible laity was how events such as the Great Schism occurred- by not discerning the nature of spiritual prophets, and letting weak-minded and willed women with visions of grandeur gain power over the masses. Gerson would also write about Ermine de Reims, and his later negative reassessment of her aligns with his opinion of visionary women at this time. Furthermore, Gerson believed that one could not discern spirits solely based on knowledge of scripture. Instead, one had to also incorporate an understanding of emotions and the concept of the soul to truly be able to discern spirits. Perhaps because of this interpretation, Gerson was able to write less negatively about female mystics, such as Joan of Arc, as we will see next.⁴⁷

Gerson is believed to have penned a treatise known as *De quadam puella*, focused on famous French figure Joan of Arc, long before she found herself in an actual inquisition trial. *De quadam puella* is a fabulous source, as it is a clear depiction of the Discernment of Spirits in action. Arguing neither for nor against Joan, unlike his works directed at other female spiritualists, Gerson lays out each succinct argument that would indicate either divine inspiration or demonic possession. While this document will be looked at in-depth in Joan's case study, it is worth discussing within the context of the development of the technique here. While many of the other treatises on the Discernment

⁴⁷ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 289-291.; Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 14. Gerson, "On Distinguishing True from False Revelations," 335-339.

of Spirits discuss the technique in relation to the political climate of the time or simply offer a description of how one might use it, *De quadam puella* demonstrated the actual technique employed to examine Joan.⁴⁸

Gerson divides the work into propositions, and places each proposition within its theological context, utilizing the knowledge he had of Joan to determine the theological arguments for or against her claims and actions. There are six propositions for Joan's divine inspiration, and six for her demonic inspiration. In his arguments for Joan's case, Gerson utilized Biblical examples like Deborah and Judith to argue that God had used the, "...weak sex and of the age of innocence to offer peoples and kingdoms the happiness of salvation," before Joan.⁴⁹ Gerson also relies on writers such as St. Augustine to establish that God does sometimes reveal himself to people when he deems it necessary, and biblical deeds like those of Moses to display her positive nature, instead of a discordant one. However, Gerson also relies on these same types of examples and writings to argue against Joan, using St. Augustine again, only this time arguing that one should not concern themselves with temporal goods. Such concern with temporal goods is a common method used by demons to sway people to their control. In addition, Gerson uses the already discussed issue of the similarities between demons and angels, as well as their shared inclination towards granting prophecies, as an argument against Joan.⁵⁰

Not only does the document show Gerson's own theological expertise, but it also displays the level of theological aptitude necessary to use a technique like the Discernment of Spirits effectively. References to both the Bible and a thousand years'

⁴⁸ Jean Gerson, "De quadam puella," in *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* by Deborah A. Fraioli, (Rochester, New York: The Boydell Press, 2000), 199-205.

⁴⁹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 201.

⁵⁰ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 202-205.

worth of theological texts fill its pages, each used to argue for or against Joan's claims of divine voices. Everything from her choice of clothing to demons enticing people with temporal goods (such as the Kingdom of France) to trick them into serving them are discussed.⁵¹ While Gerson was no inquisitor, it is easy to imagine, particularly after also examining Gui's guide, that such an in-depth investigation would also be done by an inquisitor. In truth, an inquisitor's investigation could possibly be even more in-depth, as Gerson had only the popular knowledge of Joan of Arc to work with, without the possibility of interrogating her.

Discernment of Spirits and the Complexities of Inquisition

However, for most inquisitors the Discernment of Spirits was still not a clear cut matter. While many different theologians added their interpretations and expanded the growing dialogue on the method, the technique was far from perfect. Even Gerson's best efforts did not change this fact. The theologians regularly noted the shortcomings of the method. For instance, there was a continued awareness that the inquisition's application of the technique was still a relatively new concept. While scripture established that one should always test spirits to determine their nature, the use of such a concept as an actual legal technique was still new. Furthermore, despite the biblical origins of the concept, there was no biblically-described method for how to properly discern spirits. Nowhere were rules or requirements laid out, they had to be developed, and like any newer technique, this meant it could be prone to changes. However, for theologians such as

⁵¹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 199-205.

d'Ailly, discernment was practical, because any good Christian should have to remain vigilant and always aware in God's work.⁵²

In addition, inquisitors faced the hurdle of applying what sounded good in theory to the reality in the field, which involved examining different people from different backgrounds who participated with different levels of cooperation. While practices such as torture became more widespread, particularly after the middle of the thirteenth century, torture did not offer much help when trying to determine the nature of voices someone claimed to hear in their head.⁵³ Gui himself noted the prevalence of laypeople who tried to avoid giving straight answers during inquiries, stating, "...they quickly resort to sophistries, deceit and verbal trickery to avoid detection."⁵⁴ However, amongst the various methods to counter this in his manual, none involved the Discernment of Spirits. The accused trying to sidestep answering questions could easily make discerning spirits even more difficult for inquisitors, as it was so common there might be little way to tell if a person was simply doing it out of fear, or if the inquisitor could attribute it to an evil spirit. Indeed, although Gui believed, "This double-speak is a clear sign by which heretics can be recognized," this did not mean their double-speak could only be the work of an evil spirit.⁵⁵

The very idea of utilizing the Discernment of Spirits in a logical, legal-based manner for determining the source of one's thoughts, words, and actions made for a difficult task. Faithful Christians originally intended to apply the Discernment of Spirits to themselves and the challenges they encountered in their religious lives. As most

⁵² Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 291.

⁵³ Deane, *Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 111.

⁵⁴ Gui, *Inquisitor's Manual*, 71.

⁵⁵ Gui, *Inquisitor's Manual*, 71.

religiously devout people would agree, in matters of faith one has difficulty providing any kind of hard, reasonable, substantial proof of its existence, because, by its very nature, faith is not capable of empirical testing. And Discernment of Spirits was a deeply personal practice, with one mulling over the direct influences in their spiritual lives. Yet inquisitors were attempting to use the concept of Discernment to determine the reality behind a total stranger's faith. While they believed in demons, angels, and God, they did not have empirical proof for such beliefs. They could ascribe certain physical maladies to demons, claim that certain traits indicated the influence of angels, but even their own writings show how convoluted such beliefs were. To then try to determine, purely through legal questioning, whether the actions or beliefs of other people were due to divine or demonic forces was a herculean task. Furthermore, personal, political, and social beliefs and preferences could get in the way as well, clouding their judgement. As the inquisition rose to prominence so too did the female mystic, and naturally the two clashed. Inquisitors and theologians were traditionally all males, so to have their influence as clergymen usurped by women was infuriating and concerning. Especially when many of the women mystics were of uneducated low social classes. For educated, prominent churchmen and scholars, seeing possibly illiterate women unfamiliar with centuries of theological writings gaining prominence amongst the laypeople would be deeply troubling on a spiritual level as well.

As Gerson's *De quadam puella* indicates, discerning spirits was a rigorous task that required much careful consideration, and typically a strong familiarity with theological texts upon the subject. Thus, to have women mystics with laypeople flocking readily to them indicated that many were probably not discerning spirits as carefully as

they might. So while theologians such as Henry of Langenstein were blatantly displeased with female mystics, they were equally displeased with lay men who readily submitted to the spiritual prophesizing of such mystics. For inquisitors as well, it would be a troubling situation, as this was an indication that fewer people were taking the time to discern their own spirits, and ultimately leaving more discernment for the inquisition to do. The lack of discernment also meant that laypeople were making themselves more open to heresies, something the Church had already realized laypeople were very open to.

Overall, inquisitors faced a difficult task; however they utilized theological tools as best they could to ease their job. While they were regularly prone to biases and faults, typically caused by issues of the time, they approached their job with a certain level of resourcefulness and ingenuity that is admirable. As the development of the Discernment of Spirits indicates, inquisitors attempted to apply careful consideration to their trials, and wrestled thoroughly with the complex cases brought before them. In pursuing this agenda they used reasonable analysis and developed new tools for combating new heresies. We now turn to cases that exemplify the development and use of the inquisition and techniques such as the Discernment of Spirits.

II: 14TH CENTURY CASE STUDIES: EVOLUTION OF THE TECHNIQUE

The Beguines and Marguerite Porete

Part of the negative response to women in the discernment narrative is due to the Church's dealings with the predominately female beguine movement in the High Middle Ages. As noted before, the beguines modeled themselves after the monastic orders, but unlike the monastic orders, the Church did not sanction them. Rather they were small collections of deeply spiritual women, joining together to further their spiritual understandings. And, to the Church's great annoyance, some of them tended to share their newfound spiritual ideas through treatises.⁵⁶

The aforementioned Marguerite Porete (1260-1310) was one such beguine, penning a treatise known as *Mirouer des simples ames*, or *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, in the late thirteenth century. Over a hundred years before Joan of Arc, Marguerite would find herself sentenced to death by burning as a relapsed heretic. Unlike Joan, Marguerite would have some help in her trial, if it could be called that. A strange man named Guiard of Cressonessart appeared, calling himself the Angel of Philadelphia and staunchly defending Marguerite, being consequently excommunicated and imprisoned. He too posed a general problem for the inquisitorial procedure, as the inquisitors began to unravel the story behind his title and why he chose to defend Marguerite.⁵⁷

While Marguerite did not necessarily claim the inspiration of any spirits, her trial still fits firmly within the discernment narrative. She is representative of the inquisition's troubles with the beguine movement, and her case works as a bridge between the early development of the inquisition and its character by the time of Joan's trial. Elements of

⁵⁶ Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 96-97; Field, *The Beguine*, 1-10, 30-32.

⁵⁷ Field, *The Beguine*, 1-10, 30-37.

concern for the inquisition during Joan's trial already appear during Marguerite's, especially with the addition of Guiard of Cressonessart. Contrary to Marguerite, Guiard did claim a divine inspiration, if only once, and much like Joan, his statements and activities alarmed to the Church. Meanwhile, Marguerite's gender, her spread of non-canonical ideas, and general stubbornness in the face of the Church Militant, all of which presaged issues from Joan's trial.⁵⁸

So how did Marguerite find herself before the inquisition in Paris in the early fourteenth century? While Marguerite's book later became well-known, we know little about the woman who penned it. She is believed to have been of a higher social class, clearly having access to a basic education and materials for writing. Her family is unknown, and her geographic origins can be only roughly pinpointed, but at some point she chose to join the beguine movement, and like others of the movement, she wrote a book.⁵⁹ Like most beguine works, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was odd, a convoluted, "...exploration of spiritual nonbeing."⁶⁰ While Marguerite might have seen it as spiritually profound, Guido of Collemezzo (1296-1306), then bishop of Cambrai, did not see it as such.⁶¹

Guido was an expert on interpreting Church law and had even written a reference for university students for Pope Innocent IV's interpretation of canon law. For Guido, there were no conflicting opinions to be had on Church doctrine, and dialogues such as those found in Marguerite's book would have met with hostility on his part. While no one knows how he came across Marguerite's book, his opinion of it was quite clear. He had it

⁵⁸ Field, *The Beguine*, 27-38, 217, 219.

⁵⁹ Field, *The Beguine*, 27-33.

⁶⁰ Field, *The Beguine*, 2.

⁶¹ Field, *The Beguine*, 39-42, 272.

burned in Valenciennes, and gave a letter of warning to Marguerite that if she tried writing or circulating the book or its contents again, she would be excommunicated and punished as a heretic.⁶²

Interestingly, Guido is noted to have made the distinction between Marguerite and her book. While openly condemning the book and its contents, he left Marguerite with a warning rather than condemning her as well. As we have seen with the early inquisitorial practices so far, his goal was not necessarily to condemn a heretic, but to reform a Christian who had strayed from the path.⁶³ However, despite Guido's clear warnings, Marguerite would shortly be revising and circulating her book once more, and in some rather interesting circles. Rather than sticking solely to her fellow beguines, or even just the general laity, Marguerite began submitting her work to local religious leaders for review. And, contrary to Guido's opinion on the book, at least three of these men returned positive reviews.⁶⁴

The first, John of Querayn, was a Franciscan friar near her base of operations in Valenciennes. The second was Dom Franc, a Cistercian monk from the abbey at Villers. The third was Godfrey of Fontaines (1250-1306), a local master of theology of some repute. While we have only Marguerite's addendum to *The Mirror of Simple Souls* that cites these men's reviews of her book, there is little reason for her to falsify these claims. After all, false reviews attributed to local clergy and theologians would have gotten her back into trouble quickly. All three praise the book as having a good basis in scripture, however at least two of them warn about circulating it widely and the possibility of it being easily misunderstood. However, rather than heed these warnings, Marguerite

⁶² Field, *The Beguine*, 42-45.

⁶³ Field, *The Beguine*, 45; Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 153.

⁶⁴ Field, *The Beguine*, 46-49.

instead seemed to use them to counter the opinion and warnings of Guido. Instead of her work being heretical, perhaps he simply did not understand it. Thus she continued to circulate it, now with the added reviews to lend it credence. It was during this time as well that she chose to send a copy to John of Châteauvillain, the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, which turned out to be a mistake.⁶⁵

Marguerite was possibly hoping for another good review to add to her book, however she was not to obtain such a thing. Rather, it would seem John recognized the book and contacted the inquisitor of Lorraine, possibly a man named Ralph of Ligny, who would in turn contact the new bishop of Cambrai, Philip of Marigny (-1316). Marguerite had admitted to still possessing her book, despite being warned not to, and was even sending it out to churchmen and laypeople. Philip of Marigny was not as ecclesiastically-minded as his predecessor, and was also connected politically to Paris, unlike Guido, an Italian. These may have been causes for his decision of what to do with Marguerite, for rather than handling her case, he sent her away, to face the infamous inquisitor and royal confessor, William of Paris (-1314).⁶⁶

For Marguerite, the timing of her trial could not have been worse, and is possibly one reason Philip of Marigny sent her to Paris. William, a contemporary of Bernard Gui, was a staunch Dominican, but also a political lackey of the French king Philip IV. Philip IV regularly found himself at odds with the Pope in Rome, and right before Marguerite's trial, had taken it upon himself and William to attack the Knights Templar. His actions put William at odds with the Pope and William's reputation suffered greatly at this time.

⁶⁵ Field, *The Beguine*, 49-56, 284. John Wippel, "Godfrey of Fontaines", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/godfrey/>.

⁶⁶ Field, *The Beguine*, 55-62, 174.

He was eventually suspended from the Templar trial by the Pope. Then, he was given Marguerite's trial, and the means to save face and improve his reputation appeared.⁶⁷

It would seem Marguerite was difficult for William to actually bring to Paris, with the canonists stating, "...she many times contumaciously refused to appear," in their trial opinion.⁶⁸ Eventually William had her forcibly brought, but even after her arrival she continued to be difficult, refusing repeatedly to take the oath to speak the truth. While she did acknowledge that he was a Church sanctioned inquisitor, she still refused to submit to him, and he eventually had her held in prison while excommunicated. He repeatedly offered to absolve her excommunication if she would take the oath and submit to the trial proceedings, yet she continued to refuse for over a year. And as if Marguerite's stubbornness was not enough, shortly after her arrival Guiard of Cressonessart appeared.⁶⁹

While Marguerite's case was relatively clear cut, as she had admitted to several churchmen that she had indeed violated Guido's warning about her book, Guiard provided a complication. It is unknown if he was even familiar with Marguerite or her work before her trial, or if upon hearing about her situation decided to intervene. William was not pleased, and Guiard had perhaps been speaking out about the trial around Paris before being brought in, or interrupted the proceedings to come to Marguerite's defense. William ordered him to cease this immediately, but met with the same stubbornness he found in Marguerite. Instead, Guiard chose to expound upon his claim that he was the Angel of Philadelphia, here to defend adherents of God from evil attacks, and also refused to take the oath to speak the truth. He found himself interred in prison and

⁶⁷ Field, *The Beguine*, 63-84.

⁶⁸ Field, *The Beguine*, 217.

⁶⁹ Field, *The Beguine*, 85-90.

excommunicated like Marguerite. Just like with Marguerite, William spent well over a year attempting to convince Guiard to take the oath, which eventually he did. His testimony would explain his title and corresponding spiritual ideas, and were deeply concerning to William.⁷⁰

Guiard was a male beguine, commonly known as a beguinus, and apparently he spent some time traveling around France. In 1306 he visited the lower chapel at Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, and while there he received a vision of insight that indicated he was the Angel of Philadelphia. According to him this was an office in the service of God, there could be only one officer at a time, and his duty was to defend followers of God who were under attack. He even admitted that prior to coming to Paris to defend Marguerite, he was in Reims, where he had been “defending” the populace from the local monastic orders, which presumably meant he was speaking out against them publicly. Furthermore, he claims to hold the key of David, which he says means he is close to Christ, and understands his will. The Pope, according to him, holds a key of ministry, which is basically a symbol of administration over the clergy and little more. He also admits to having a small group of followers, describing their manner of dress for identification. Lastly, he interprets himself and his powers contrary to scripture, giving himself a status equal to that of the Church Militant.⁷¹

Naturally, such ideas were not well received by William, or any of the clergy or theologians William would turn to for assistance. Despite waiting a year and a half for both to submit, William was having little success, and began to proceed with sentencing them. While a year and a half seems like a rather generous amount of time to wait,

⁷⁰ Field, *The Beguine*, 89-90.

⁷¹ Field, *The Beguine*, 34-37, 219-221.

William was still dealing with fallout from the Templar trials, and also trying to repair his reputation. It would seem that after the backfiring of the Templar issue, he chose to abide by the book for Marguerite's trial, utilizing the inquisitorial techniques developed by that point. Bernard Gui later included the lengthy excommunication technique in his manual, as a common tactic for those who refused to take an oath.⁷² Torture was not used, as it was really rather unnecessary. After all, Marguerite had admitted her guilt multiple times to several different churchmen, and it seemed pointless to torture her simply to get her to take the oath. Guiard had made his own heretical ideas quite known, so it would be an unnecessary technique there as well. Additionally, William had used torture on some of the Templars to force confessions, only to have those confessions later recanted, and probably did not wish to run that risk again so soon. Moreover, the lack of torture and the extreme length of time he waited made him look better. The populace might see him as being patient, kindly waiting for two guilty heretics to come to their senses and recant.⁷³

It also gave him time to consult other clergy and theologians about the case. While the verdict on Marguerite and Guiard might have seemed obvious, William was still in a difficult situation with regards to the pope. Seeking the consultation of other Churchmen and theologians would validate his verdict, providing multiple pieces of evidence that both Marguerite and Guiard had indeed violated Church law. If he had a multitude of clergy and theologians on his side, then it would appear that clearly William was in the right. In addition, William could use this time to gather witness testimony, further strengthening his verdict. How he collected these testimonies remains a mystery, but the trial documentation indicated that he had, "...the depositions of many

⁷² Field, *The Beguine*, 91-96; Gui, *Inquisitor's Guide*, 129.

⁷³ Field, *The Beguine*, 91-96.

witnesses.”⁷⁴ The most probable subjects are the various other Churchmen who first brought Marguerite’s trial to William. After all, Marguerite had admitted to several of them to have violated Guido’s warning, and John of Châteaouvillain had even obtained a copy of the damning book.⁷⁵

William’s inclusion of theological consultation also set a new precedent, especially in regards to judging *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Rather than seek the judgement of the theologians in regard to Marguerite herself, he consulted them on the actual validity of the ideas expressed within the book. In their opinion on the book, they explicitly state that William had, “...asked for counsel from these masters, as to what should be done about a certain book.”⁷⁶ While not sanctioned inquisitors, these men could still affect the outcome of the case, but only by judging the content of the book, not the person who wrote it. William did not give them the title of the book, or even the author’s name, meaning their opinion would not be clouded by possible knowledge of Marguerite. They were not judging a person, which was the role of the inquisitor, but rather the ideas espoused by that person. Essentially, they were discerning the nature of Marguerite’s book. William’s tactic connected the faculty of the University of Paris to the inquisition in a new way, a connection that would only strengthen in coming years, as we will see with Joan’s trial. The connection to the University would also encourage the use of the discernment method, as these men would bring their scholastic training and vast knowledge of theological texts with them to aid in the further development of inquisitorial techniques. Future Discernment cases required more than just comparison’s to scripture to solve the identity of people’s spirits, and the University of Paris brought a

⁷⁴ Field, *The Beguine*, 225.

⁷⁵ Field, *The Beguine*, 95-103.

⁷⁶ Field, *The Beguine*, 223.

large body of theological work to rely upon, as well as men heavily trained in religious scholarship.⁷⁷

As for what the theologians thought of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, their opinion was in line with that of William, and previously Guido. The consultation team of twenty-one theologians stated that, "...such a book, in which the said articles are contained, should be exterminated as heretical and erroneous and containing heresy and errors."⁷⁸ Their opinion was based on at least fifteen excerpts William sent them. While one can imagine William carefully selected the most damning excerpts, sending excerpts was the common practice of the time for inquisitors, and truthfully he probably did not have to be very discerning in choosing excerpts. Thus, Marguerite's book was considered heretical, and the canon lawyers William consulted for the case came to the same conclusion about the author.⁷⁹

In many ways, Marguerite's stubbornness was her undoing, with William and the canon lawyers both admonishing her for refusing to follow Guido's orders, then refusing her summons, then refusing to take the oath. To them, she had been living willingly in an excommunicated state for well over a year now, refusing every opportunity William presented her to take the oath. Such obstinacy will reappear in Joan's trial, particularly with her choice of clothing. Furthermore, Marguerite was considered a relapsed heretic. She had been provided ample warning of her heresy, had been trusted to not continue it, and then had blatantly violated such commands. And she was also a danger to other souls as well. Her insistence on circulating her book, willingly putting her ideas out for others to read, especially amongst the laity, was endangering them as well. In many ways this

⁷⁷ Field, *The Beguine*, 125-133.

⁷⁸ Field, *The Beguine*, 224.

⁷⁹ Field, *The Beguine*, 125-144.

was part of the reason for the warnings she had received from John of Querayn and Godfrey of Fontaines, the concern that even if her ideas were based in scripture, they could easily turn people from the proper path.⁸⁰

Guiard, although he would avoid burning like Marguerite due to testifying, was punished with an indefinite prison sentence. William and the canon lawyers had a good deal to be concerned about with the man, and labeled him, "...pseudoreligious."⁸¹ His various claims were deemed heretical, and he was considered a danger to the authority of the Pope. He was also, like Joan would be, considered an opponent of the Church Militant. The canon lawyers understood his spiritual ideas to be indicating there were actually two Church Militants, one of which Guiard was in charge of. Such a belief was perceived as an attack on the Church Militant and its authority. While Guiard did not expressly state his ideas came from spirits, but rather a single case of spiritual insight, his ideas are dealt with in much the same manner as the typical discernment method. William and the canon lawyers pointed out where they violated scripture, such as the Book of Apocalypse. They addressed how such ideas undermined the authority of the Church Militant, with the idea that orders from God could not be different from the actions of his Church. Each idea and practice of Guiard's was examined closely, and matched up to corresponding Church doctrine, and it was found lacking. Lastly, the fact that Guiard had followers was undoubtedly a concern for the inquisition, as like Marguerite and later Joan, it meant he was spreading his heretical ideas. He was damning not just his soul, but others as well.⁸²

⁸⁰ Field, *The Beguine*, 222-226.

⁸¹ Field, *The Beguine*, 219.

⁸² Field, *The Beguine*, 219-222.

One other similarity between Guiard and Marguerite, and perhaps one of the more damning ones, both Marguerite and Guiard tend to have an air of spiritual authority about them. Their accusers called them both beguines, who many viewed as a group who thought themselves spiritually important. Furthermore, Marguerite's interpretations of John of Querayn and Godfrey of Fontaines' warnings indicate she considered those who understood her book of being of a higher spiritual calling, unlike Guido of Collemezzo. Considering Guido was a bishop, and that Marguerite's inquisitor, university theologians, and canon lawyers all held similar beliefs to him, such thinking would be ill-received. Furthermore, as the case of Ermine de Reims will show, humility was more likely to be believed as divine in origin.⁸³

Marguerite Porete and the Discernment Method

On May 31st 1310, Marguerite Porete would be sentenced to death by burning for being a relapsed heretic, as Joan would 121 years later, a mere day before in the year.⁸⁴ Though Marguerite's case had little to do with spirits, in many ways it helped set the stage for how the discernment technique will be used in Joan's trial, and the general attitude towards powerful spiritual women of the time. Much like Bridget and Catherine, Marguerite provided a negative precedent for clerical reactions to Joan. Both women's stubbornness in the face of their inquisitors tended to be their undoing, and their refusal to submit to the Church Militant sealed their fate.

Throughout Marguerite's trial techniques were used and developed that would find constant use in Joan's and other discernment trials. Predating the writing of Bernard

⁸³ Field, *The Beguine*, 34, 53-54, 219-222; Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 255.

⁸⁴ Field, *The Beguine*, 153; Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 358-359.

Gui's manual, Marguerite's trial was still an early stage for the inquisition, and provided an opportunity to develop new solutions to the problem of heresy. William's use of excommunication until an oath of truth was taken was a common enough technique to make it into Gui's manual. Similarly, when faced with the claims of a sort of mystic like Guiard, the canon lawyers and William turn to scripture. Joan's inquisitors relied heavily on scripture to determine the nature of her spirits. When faced with nebulous spiritual claims, the best course of action seemed to be consulting scripture. If things did not line up, then deception or heresy of some kind must have been at work, for why would good spirits deviate from their own teachings?

William of Paris' use of theologians set a precedent that would prove to be highly effective for the inquisition, especially when faced with people like Joan. His consultations on Marguerite's book laid a framework for a practice that would shape the inquisition for the coming years. More and more theologically minded men found themselves either working as, for, or with inquisitors, whether appointed directly to cases, or sought by inquisitors for assistance. By the time of Joan's trial, her inquisitors would seek the deliberations of both the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Canon Law of the University of Paris, and refused to pass judgement until they had obtained them. Indeed, many of her inquisitors insured their own deliberations included sections indicating their opinion would be modified to align with those of the university men. The inquisitors' deference indicates an authoritative position developed for the theologians in regards to the inquisition.

Furthermore, there is the very nature of Marguerite's book, and the warnings given by her reviewers about it. In many ways, much like spirits, the contents of

Marguerite's book required careful discernment, otherwise one could get the wrong ideas. And the clergy were fast coming to believe that the masses were not very good at discernment, as theologians such as Henry of Langenstein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson would opine. While a prominent theologian such as Godfrey of Fontaines seemed to have good things to say about *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, inquisitors needed to take into account the effect it would have on the general public. As stated before, the job of an inquisitor was to defend against heresy, to root it out and nip it in the bud. While learned scholars might be able to interpret Church doctrine in Marguerite's book, with their knowledge and familiarity with a variety of theological writings, the laity was less likely to do so. Subtle technicalities and distinctions might be lost on them, and could result in an incorrect interpretation. For William, this could easily invite a spread of heresy, and that would be a failure in his role as inquisitor.

Altogether, while Marguerite's case is far more straightforward than Joan's will be, it displays the early development of the inquisition, particularly techniques that would find later use in discernment cases. It sets the stage for the manual of Bernard Gui, the role of the University of Paris in Joan's trial, and the growing concern over female mysticism that would be prominently discussed in early discernment writings. It also exemplified the growing popularity of female mystics, and the Church's attempts at handling the situation. However, while the case of Marguerite and later Joan tended to display a common disapproval amongst clergy towards female mysticism, not all clergy would argue. Some, as we will see with the next case, seemed to approve the rise of female mystics.

Ermine de Reims and her Visions

Having recently moved to Reims before being widowed in 1393, Ermine de Reims (1347-1396) is a divergence in the tale of discernment. Her discernment case does not involve a trial, or burning, or any inquisitors. However, it does involve visions of both a demonic and divine nature, and eventually Jean Gerson. Upon moving to Reims, she and her husband moved in near the priory of Saint Paul du Val-des-Ecoliers, run by a small group who had recently obtained sanction from the Church to operate much like the monastic orders. They chose the subprior Jean le Graveur as their confessor, a decision that would later impact Ermine immensely.⁸⁵

When her husband died, Ermine, like most medieval women, had a few options. She could have continued working, relied on friends to house her, or join a religious organization, which was a common choice for many. Her friends even approached her, telling her to return to the countryside where they could care for her. Ermine, uncertain what to do, went to Jean le Graveur for advice. Rather than send her back to the countryside with her friends, Jean had a different solution in mind. He bade Ermine stay in Reims, where he would set up a small room overlooking the priory courtyard. She took at least one monastic vow, and also helped around the priory. In many ways, Jean offered a sort of quasi-monastic life for Ermine, and she willingly accepted. Little was she prepared for what this situation would bring her in the future.⁸⁶

Jean le Graveur's living arrangements for Ermine were more than a little odd. A newly widowed woman living alone with her confessor and a group of other men was not

⁸⁵ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims (c. 1347-1396): A Medieval Woman between Demons and Saints*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2015), 1-11.

⁸⁶ Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 13, 17-21.

exactly common for monastic orders, or any other clergy members. However, when Jean would begin chronicling Ermine's visions, he would spend a good portion of the introduction establishing that there was nothing untoward about his relationship with his charge. The version of *The Visions of Ermine de Reims* that Jean would set about circulating, including giving a copy to Jean Gerson, was not the original. It was a modified version, one in which he clearly admits to leaving out many of Ermine's visions, but also one he regularly intersperses with his thoughts and warnings about her visions. While it is designed like a chronological diary of her regular visionary occurrences, it is not the same as a direct account of what she experienced. Jean frames it within his own teachings and experiences, and posits it as a lesson for learning the deceptions of the devil, and how to protect oneself from them. And within this version he repeatedly works to establish the wholesome nature of his interactions with Ermine, in many ways reporting her visions with an almost clinical detachment.⁸⁷

Jean's role fit the Holy Couples model: essentially female mystics with their male clerical guides. With the growing number of female mystics in this period, it was becoming a common occurrence that many either approached, or were approached by, clergymen seeking to transcribe their visions and lessons. Despite the warnings of Henry of Langenstein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson, many clergymen found assisting female mystics as a way to bring themselves closer to divinity. They commonly ascribed themselves roles as a mentor or a scribe, and tracked the lives and visions of their chosen mystic.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 27-29, 45, 47.

⁸⁸Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 29, 33-45.

Jean le Graveur fit this role easily, transcribing the visions Ermine recounts to him, offering her (and the reader) guidance, and generally seeing to Ermine's spiritual learning. Furthermore, the fact that he was from a relatively new religious order is also noteworthy, and lends credence to his goal of mentoring Ermine into a female mystic. In many ways, the trials and tribulations found within Ermine's *Visions* are comparable to those undergone by saints, and indicated Jean's goal for Ermine: sainthood. For a new religious order, producing a saint would be quite the boon. As mentioned with Catherine of Siena and the Dominicans, sometimes religious orders were less severe in their judgment of one's spirits if there was something to be gained from it, particularly the creation of a saint.⁸⁹

Jean was certainly thorough in placing Ermine's visions within a saintly narrative. First, within his account of Ermine's story, he assures the reader repeatedly that she is telling the truth, seeking her reaffirmation regularly. He does so in the very introduction, narrating his talk with her about the veracity of her claims, repeatedly asking her if it is the truth. He states, "...however many times I asked her, I believed her because of her simplicity she was incapable to invent the marvelous things that you will read."⁹⁰ Jean viewed Ermine as too simple a person to lie, or to even be able to fabricate such stories in the first place. He then begins to recount her visions as she reports them to him, interspersed with his commentary, and his own guidance that he gave to her. In this

⁸⁹Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 27-29; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 280-284.

⁹⁰ Jean le Graveur, "The Visions of Ermine de Reims," in *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims (c. 1347-1396): A Medieval Woman between Demons and Saints*, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2015), 158.

manner he displays himself as her spiritual guide, and guides the reader through the discernment process as well.⁹¹

Ermine's visions are a violent and harrowing ordeal. She is harassed and assaulted by demons daily, as well as a variety of animals. Jean recounts the physical signs of her ordeals that can be found on her body, such as black eyes and bruises from being repeatedly slapped, thrown, kicked, and the like. Ermine is attacked by snakes, flies, toads, bats, even large demonic dogs, and a smorgasbord of demons frequently, even in broad daylight. They mock her sexuality, her piety, her trust in Jean, and her penitential practices. While she is occasionally graced with divine visions, they are few and far between, and most of her at-first seemingly saintly visitors are revealed as demons.⁹²

However, through the content of these constant attacks on Ermine, Jean displays many of the important tenets of Church doctrine at the time, while also commenting on several spiritual practices of the laity. The demons harass Ermine with terrible visions about the Eucharist, which is reminiscent of the commonality of Eucharist visions amongst female mystics of the time. The demons also offer Ermine private Communion, telling her she could have Communion administered to her without even having to get out of bed. However she drives them away on the basis that Jean had insisted she have Communion properly at an earlier time. Private Communion, which could be administered to the ill, was still a practice frowned upon for widespread use. Jean is therefore able to remind readers of clerical attitudes towards a particular practice through Ermine's ordeal.⁹³

⁹¹Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 45-46, 157-159.

⁹²Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 49, 92, 100, 114.

⁹³Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 63-79.

The demons also attack Ermine's severe penitential practices, chastising her for her abstinence, her hair shirts, and her bodily harm. Naturally, demons would be displeased with such extreme forms of devotion, as their goal is to tempt people from the proper path. Extreme devotion tends to indicate someone is much harder to tempt. However, Jean uses some of these attacks to point out the issue most clergymen took with extreme penitential practices: a lack of moderation. While he commends Ermine on her piety repeatedly, he also includes narrations about his admonishing of some of her more extreme penitential practices, reminding her constantly of moderation.⁹⁴

One of the most repetitive aspects of Ermine's visions is her demon's constant attempts to pry her away from Jean's influence. They come disguised as her friends, insisting she move to the countryside, they come disguised as Jean himself, and attempt to harm her, they come as saints and chastise her for trusting him. Using these demonic attempts at separation, Jean could strengthen both their position as a holy couple, displaying Ermine's unwavering faith in Jean's counsel, and exemplifying how effective his counsel has been for her. It is also an aspect of discernment Jean displays to the reader. Naturally demons would have a problem with the influence of clergy on the people they seek to sway, and would try fervently to rid their prey of such an influence. Attempted separation is also a method with which to identify demonic spirits, since divine spirits would not seek to separate someone from the Church's influence. Thus, even if the demons come disguised as saints, the minute they begin insisting Ermine separate from Jean, she can tell their true nature.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 80-87.

⁹⁵Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 49, 87.

Demonic attempts at separating people from the Church's influence is not the only discernment aspect noted in Jean's chronicle. He also indicates the importance of feeling for discerning the true nature of Ermine's visions. While it seems that demonic impersonation of saints was not a common visionary element up until this point, it occurs repeatedly for Ermine. Yet despite her demons' best efforts, she can always tell it is them and not a real saint. One of the tell-tale signs for her is severe feelings of fear in their presence. Jean recounts that during one of her visions, "...in her spirit she was so terrified that she trembled all over, for she knew very well that these were demons."⁹⁶ No matter how pretty a face the demons put on, no matter how sweet they speak, Ermine knows them from the fear she feels upon seeing them. Contrary to this, her few divine visions are accompanied by feelings of joy and peace, even after the visitation ends. Whereas if demons visit, Ermine describes overwhelming fear, in many cases unable to return to sleep or proceeding to pray for hours on end out of terror. Jean helps explain to her that she should rely on this feeling, for she is picking up the true nature of her visitors. Thus, to be able to properly discern spirits, one needed to pay close attention to the emotions elicited by said spirits.⁹⁷

The last major aspect of discernment Jean touches upon when recounting Ermine's visions is her humility. Ermine's simple humility draws an interesting connection with the case of Marguerite and later Joan, both of whom did not necessarily present themselves in the most humble of ways. Jean posits repeatedly that Ermine's simplicity, and her insistence on being so, is one of the reasons she can discern her spirits so well. As he points out, when she is approached by saints, she regularly questions their

⁹⁶ Le Graveur, "The Visions of Ermine de Reims," 164.

⁹⁷ Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 136, 164-165, 177.

appearing to her, as she feels completely unworthy of their presence. She frustrates her demonic deceivers attempts at disguise by often telling them she knows they are demons because no saint would waste their time on visiting her. When she does experience divine visions, she spends a good deal of time refusing to believe it, causing the spirits to go above and beyond in proving their nature. Jean describes Ermine in the introduction to the *Visions* as, "...so steeped in true and profound humility...that she never wanted to do homage to any spirit that was shown to her..".⁹⁸ Ermine's skepticism with her spirits contrasts with Joan's easy interaction with her spirits, such as her boasts about the things they have told her and the mission they have sent her upon. Ermine's humility also contrasts with Marguerite's opinion of her book, that some people simply are not spiritually enlightened enough to understand her work. Compared to them, Ermine is a simple woman who remains steadfast in her piety, wary of all her visions, and humble until her death.⁹⁹

While Ermine might have been humble until her death, Jean's account of her attempted still further to display her in a traditional saintly narrative. Her repeated attacks at the hands of demons and animals was likened to that of the ancient desert saints of Christian tradition, and Jean even compares some of her trials to that of stories from the Gospel. In this manner Jean might have circumvented accusations of witchcraft directed at Ermine. Ermine was visited by demons regularly, many of them fly her around, depositing her on roofs or in forests away from home, and they make repeated sexual advances on her. All of these are elements to be found in the later witchcraft trials, yet somehow Ermine manages to avoid this correlation. Some of the demons even accused

⁹⁸ Le Graveur, "The Visions of Ermine de Reims," 159.

⁹⁹ Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 143; Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 202, 224, 227; Field, *The Beguine*, 49-56.

Ermine of sorcery, the precursor to witchcraft. Yet through Jean's careful narration and framing of Ermine in a simple and saintly manner, he seems to bypass such accusations entirely. While Jean's narration is clever manipulation, it still indicated the growing concerns over witchcraft that developed after the Great Schism.¹⁰⁰

Ermine de Reims and Jean Gerson

Ermine's case, much like Joan's, also connects to Jean Gerson, as Jean le Graveur and his superior would send him a copy of the *Visions* for his opinion. Interestingly, Gerson's first response was a relatively positive one, though cautionary. He drew three conclusions in response to the text. The first was that he finds nothing contrary to Church doctrine and Christian teaching within the text, and noted the comparisons to the stories of desert saints. When connecting Ermine's tale to the desert saints, Gerson also indicated the early foundations of Discernment of Spirits. He pointed out that early Christian figures, "...were attacked or deluded many times by demons," in much the same manner as Ermine.¹⁰¹ As noted with Joan and Marguerite's trials, this is an important aspect of discernment: ensuring the actions of the mystic and their spirits line up with scripture.¹⁰²

The second conclusion touches on miracles, much like Joan's trial will, though he was more forgiving than Joan's inquisitors were. While not everything Ermine does was necessarily miraculous, and even some of the things Jean considers miraculous could easily have mundane explanations, there was also nothing to prove otherwise found in the

¹⁰⁰Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 98-100, 114, 168.

¹⁰¹ Jean Gerson, "Letter to Jean Morel," in *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims (c. 1347-1396): A Medieval Woman between Demons and Saints*, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2015), 183.

¹⁰² Gerson, "Letter to Jean Morel," 182-183

text. Gerson stated that, “When something doubtful happens with a miracle, it seems that divine omnipotence is more honored, as well as Christian religion, in attributing to a miracle that which happened, rather than in stubbornly denying the miraculous.”¹⁰³ In other words, Christianity is strengthened by belief in miracles, thus it is better to believe something is miraculous. Furthermore, Gerson stated that in a case such as this one, with several witnesses of good standing, particularly men of the Church, one should be inclined to believe claims unless there is good evidence something is fake. With this one can see Gerson trying to maintain a cohesive authority of the Church, rather than doubting his fellow clergymen. Cohesion would have been a particularly important front to maintain during the time of the Great Schism, where even the laity was painfully aware of the divisions shaking the Church.¹⁰⁴

Gerson’s final conclusion recalls the reviews of Marguerite’s book, as he warns against widely circulating the tale for a variety of reasons. Most notable of these reasons, particularly coming from Gerson, was the idea that people in a position of power or who deem themselves powerful might be incensed by a simple woman such as Ermine battling demons successfully. Such a concern recalled the backlash from men like Henry of Langenstein, who decried the weak and foolish womanly state of the Church at the time. Gerson also worries, much like Marguerite’s reviewers, that, “..the limited learning of many people in scripture and sacred history,” might result in misunderstanding Ermine’s story.¹⁰⁵ Such a concern, coming from the Chancellor of the University of Paris, also demonstrated the growing authority of theologians due to William’s handling of Marguerite’s trial. Theologians’ immense knowledge of scripture and theological texts is

¹⁰³ Gerson, “Letter to Jean Morel,” 184.

¹⁰⁴ Gerson, “Letter to Jean Morel,” 183-184.

¹⁰⁵ Gerson, “Letter to Jean Morel,” 184; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 284-287.

becoming increasingly relied upon, and they are regularly being turned to for all matters of faith. As Gerson himself states in the opening of his letter, the only reason he is even commenting upon Ermine's case is because Jean Morel, Jean le Graveur's superior, asked him to. In this case, Gerson's involvement would prove particularly beneficial to the discernment narrative, providing an early case for him to examine and use as an example in his writings.¹⁰⁶

In his later theological texts, Gerson is noted to have a rather different opinion of Ermine's case, considering himself to have nearly been fooled by it. It would be around this time that he would pen many of his discernment texts, especially in response to Bridget and Catherine, so it is very possible they soured his opinion of Ermine. However, with the Hundred Years' War in full swing, and Gerson in exile, it is possible he also no longer felt the need to maintain cohesion in a Church environment he had become removed from. The friends that would have inquired about Ermine were dead or too far away for him to care. Furthermore, with cases such as Joan's developing, Gerson may have also found himself growing increasingly wary of the seemingly never-ending stream of female mystics to be found. However, as early as his letter to Jean Morel, he did point out that, regarding Ermine, "There is no doubt that objections can be made in almost all matters, even those that are most true."¹⁰⁷ With a statement like this, Gerson indicated that even when he first read about Ermine's visions, he felt the need to be careful about their nature.

¹⁰⁶ Gerson, "Letter to Jean Morel," 182-184.

¹⁰⁷ Gerson, "Letter to Jean Morel," 186; Blumenfeld-Kosinsky, *Ermine de Reims*, 144-150.

Onward to the 15th Century

The cases of Marguerite Porete and Ermine de Reims display the early beginnings of both the inquisition and the Discernment technique. While Marguerite claimed no spirits, her inquisitorial trial provided new techniques that would inform the Discernment of Spirits. Reliance on scripture for determining the validity of claims, concerns over how laity might be influenced, and the problem of spiritual superiority all repeatedly show up in discernment cases. Practices such as excommunication for refusal to take an oath will be modified for Joan's trial, instead withholding Communion for her refusal to agree to the demands of her inquisitors. William's use of theologians became a common practice, particularly for dealing with the tricky nature of discernment cases, as we will see with Joan. Even Jean Gerson's increasing role as a consultant for discernment cases can be traced back to William's connecting of the inquisition with the University of Paris.

Jean Gerson's early practice with Ermine's visions allowed him to gain experience that would be utilized when writing both his discernment treatises and *De quadam puella*. Furthermore, many of the techniques discussed by Jean le Graveur became common tenets of the Discernment of Spirits. Ermine's humility and fear run counter to the attitude Joan of Arc will display in her trial. Her realization that demons' wanted to separate her from clerical influence would also run counter to Joan's attitude towards the clergy during her trial. Jean le Graveur provided clear techniques for discernment, and indicated with Ermine that even the laity could accomplish such a feat. However, he also reinforced the importance of the clergy for proper discernment, establishing himself as Ermine's guide, and repeatedly exemplifying his importance in her handling of her visions. Jean's example of himself as Ermine's spiritual guide

reinforced the importance of the clergy, and subsequently inquisitors, in discerning the nature of someone's spirits.

III: 15TH CENTURY: THE CASE OF JOAN OF ARC: DEVELOPED METHODOLOGY

Joan of Arc in *De quadam puella*

Joan of Arc (1412-1431) is the most high profile of these three cases. However, while her person and trial have been heavily studied, this examination seeks to frame her importance within the development of the discernment of spirits technique. As such, primary focus is paid to how theologians and her inquisitors handled the Discernment of Spirits in regards to her person and trial. Rousing the populace of France during the Hundred Years' War, Joan of Arc is one of the most famous spiritual figures of the Middle Ages. Eventually burned as a heretic after a highly politicized trial, her claims to hear voices from God, angels, and saints caught the attention of many theologians of the time, not only those who oversaw her trial. In particular, Jean Gerson is credited with the aforementioned *De quadam puella*, or *Concerning a Certain Young Girl*, around 1429, before Joan's capture. *De quadam puella* document is perhaps the best example of the use of Discernment of Spirits, as it was structured to provide six arguments in favor of divine spirits, and six arguments in favor of diabolical spirits. Such a structure means it focuses more on the technique than the outcome of the technique.¹⁰⁸

First, the contents of *De quadam puella* are not so different from many of the issues that will be raised during Joan's trial by her inquisitors. It is highly likely, especially if the document was authored by Jean Gerson, that many theologians and inquisitors, particularly in France, would be familiar with it. While none of those directly involved with the case mention the tract directly, they speak upon the same issues and

¹⁰⁸ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 199-200.

utilize the same techniques in their trial dispositions.¹⁰⁹ The document focuses on the facts of Joan's life that are common knowledge, and while there are not many, those facts are each measured and utilized to the fullest via the Discernment of Spirits. Upbringing, gender, clothing choice, and so forth, all play a role in discerning the nature of Joan's spirits. In addition, by laying out this guide for Discernment with six propositions for and six against, a sense of equality is created, and blatant biases seem avoided. *De quadam puella* appears as exactly what its author intends- a guide for discerning spirits, instead of a decision on the nature of Joan's spirits.¹¹⁰

De quadam puella laid out the propositions in Joan's defense, with the first establishing that Joan herself is, indeed, human. She herself is not some demoness, or the devil in disguise, she is a human woman who eats, drinks, sleeps, and so on. Proposition two deals with her prophecies, and their placement within the Church timeline, namely that any time is appropriate for prophecy. Naturally, most theologians would be familiar with the idea that many prophecies are attributed to the time before the normative Church was established, rather than during their own times, however, this proposition runs counter to that line of thought. Prophecy can be necessary in troubled times, to help strengthen the Church and its tenets. The third proposition follows from the second, strengthening the argument that God's work can occur at any time or place, via any person. To argue this, theological works such as St. Augustine's *City of God* are used, stating that God reveals himself to certain people when he deems it necessary to assist mankind.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 200-205.

¹¹⁰ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 200-205.

¹¹¹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 200-201.

The fourth proposition addresses a concern already raised in the Discernment of Spirits' dialogue: Joan's gender. As displayed with Bridget and Catherine, female mystics of any sort were regularly received poorly, particularly by Jean Gerson himself. However, this proposition seeks to defend Joan's gender, citing biblical figures such as Deborah and Judith as examples of God using those of the, "...weak sex and of the age of innocence to offer peoples and kingdoms the happiness of salvation."¹¹² In other words, Joan's gender was not necessarily the concern; it was the nature of her spirits and the actions she chooses to take that should be focused on. Continuing from this, proposition five addresses another major Discernment issue, tackling the question of whether Joan's prophecies follow demonic or divine characteristics. Proposition five argues that Joan's actions indicated a divine origin for her prophecies, as she preaches virtuous practices for her followers and uses her situation to advocate for peace. Such goals are not the work of demons, who seek only to sow discord and drive people from their faith. The last proposition summarizes the other five propositions and determines that it follows that she was indeed sent by God to perform his work, in this case to rescue the French from the English and the Hundred Years' War.¹¹³

However, *De quadam puella* also contains six propositions against Joan, laid out much the same as the six for her. The first proposition against Joan uses the biblical concept that God states that many false prophets will attribute their work to him, and thus deceive a great many people. Furthermore, the Devil can appear as an angel of good, rather than evil, deceiving these prophets themselves.¹¹⁴ In the second proposition, Gerson draws upon the early theological ideas already expressed by St. John of

¹¹² Gerson, "De quadam puella," 201.

¹¹³ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 202-203.

¹¹⁴ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 203.

Damascus, that demons and angels have similar capabilities. He stated that fake prophets are also able to reveal future events thanks to the superior intelligence of the demons using them. Revealing such events makes them appear legitimate, particularly when such predicted events come to pass.¹¹⁵

The third proposition continues this argument, reinforcing the difficulty in determining whether someone is a real or fake prophet, since both Godly and demonic prophets tend to act and speak in the same manner, and show such similar abilities. Gerson actually references St. John's ideas directly in this proposition, emphasizing the importance of discerning the nature of spirits, particularly in regards to prophets.¹¹⁶ Continuing to draw from former theological figures, the fourth proposition cites St. Augustine and biblical examples that state that while temporal or worldly goods can seem to be granted from God, in reality God is concerned less with temporal goods; instead goods from God come in the afterlife. Thus, demons use temporal goods to sway those in troubled times, thinking that God is benefiting them while they still walk the earth, when in reality, they should forego material happiness in the here and now, and instead seek spiritual happiness that will come later. Therefore, it is more likely for demons, rather than God, to invest in the political future of France, using it as a means to sway the French populace.¹¹⁷

The fifth proposition addresses an issue that would later be brought up repeatedly during Joan's trial. In this proposition, Gerson draws on Deuteronomy to challenge Joan's chosen attire and haircut. Joan's dressing as a man, complete with a shaved head, directly violates scripture, and this argument is one of the most effective against her.

¹¹⁵ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 203; St. John of Damascus, "De fide orthodoxa," 42.

¹¹⁶ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 203-204.

¹¹⁷ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204.

Violating scripture is violating the word of God himself, and if one were truly an agent of God they would not blatantly disregard his doctrines. In addition, he pointed out that female prophets such as Judith, despite their missions, maintained a feminine air, which Joan does not. Joan's actions put her at odds with orthodoxy, and her biblical precedents.¹¹⁸ The sixth and final proposition wraps the overall argument against Joan up by stating that the evidence proving God is acting through Joan is unsatisfactory, and quite questionable. Fake prophets are similar to real ones, and thus discernment is necessary in the case of Joan of Arc. In this manner reasonable arguments against Joan are provided, that conflict quite well with his arguments for her, providing a sense of balance to the overall document.¹¹⁹

Overall, *De quadam puella* utilized many of the characteristics of Discernment laid out so far, but also displays how developed the technique had become. The document maintains a logical and formulaic manner while addressing many of the major Discernment issues mentioned so far. In this manner it exemplifies how the technique had begun to solidify into a coherent method for repetitive use. However, as Gui had pointed out in his manual, every case of heresy was different, and sometimes no matter how codified a method you had, it would not suffice. Joan of Arc's trial, which we turn to next, was about to challenge both inquisitors and the Discernment of Spirits in a manner not seen before.

¹¹⁸ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204-205.

¹¹⁹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 205.

The Trial of Joan of Arc

Many of the arguments made in *De quadam puella* would resurface during Joan's trial before her burning at the stake in 1431, and in the documents from the theologians who attended the trial. Sixty politicians, theologians, lawyers, and other prominent religious figures played a role in her trial, and their opinions are numerous. Despite the large number and variety of men present, many common arguments are found amongst them. By tracing these arguments, one can see how the Discernment of Spirits technique had developed and how inquisitors implemented it.¹²⁰

Joan's trial tended to be convoluted and circular, with many of the same arguments being made between her and her inquisitors on a daily, sometimes even hourly basis. Furthermore, there is a noted political element to her trial, with many of her inquisitors and deliberators being known English sympathizers or having ties to the English, such as Zanon de Castiglione, Bishop of Lisieux, and Guillaume Erart, Doctor of Theology.¹²¹ However, these men still framed their arguments as men of religion with clerical rather than merely political concerns. Zanon himself began his opinion discussing the troubles with discernment, stating, "It is not easy to distinguish by what spirit the mind is directed...".¹²² Thus, the deliberations made by those involved in the proceedings are a valuable narrative of inquisitorial concerns and techniques, including the Discernment of Spirits.

The trial proceedings began in January of 1431, and would last until the end of May. The inquisitors assigned to her trial spent months questioning her, repeatedly

¹²⁰ W.P. Barrett, trans., *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1932) in the Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project, accessed November 20, 2018, viii, 367.

¹²¹ Pierre Champion, *Dramatis Personae*, trans., Coley Taylor and Ruth H. Kerr (1932) in the Fordham U Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project, accessed November 20, 2018, 458, 461.

¹²² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 276.

having to stop due to her refusal to answer questions, general exhaustion, or awaiting the arrival of more documents or inquisitors. Eventually they composed twelve articles that laid out the main concerns of the trial, and would submit them to the doctors of the University of Paris and other noteworthy theologians for further deliberation. Finally they sought to obtain a recantation from Joan, and an agreement to submit to the Church and its doctrines, or burn as a heretic and witch.¹²³

Given the convoluted character of Joan's trial, the inquisitors decided to condense the evidence into twelve articles for general dissemination to other theologians, however, the articles they questioned her on leading up to the accusations are full of the discernment technique, and should not be overlooked. The inquisitors hounded her about her spirits, exploring every detail she provided about them in an attempt to determine their origins and nature. Details Joan even considers unimportant are examined closely, and questions are repeated to see if the answers remained the same day to day, week to week. Joan's responses and actions tend to be evasive, frustrating the inquisitors continually, and increasing their suspicions. Furthermore, social issues sneak into the questioning, notably the proper roles of men and women, and the difficulties of an unlearned populace versus the increasingly powerful learned university scholars, reflecting the statements of Hildegard about the effeminate age.¹²⁴

Joan's inquisitors grilled her about her spirits, with concerns ranging from whether she can see them, to what they wear, how they sound, and if she can physically interact with them.¹²⁵ Her responses tended to distress the inquisitors, who were greatly

¹²³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 4, 147, 242, 251, 306, 357.

¹²⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 53-54, 201, 215-216, 255; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14-19, 274-276.

¹²⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 42-43, 70-72, 74, 77.

disturbed that she never went to clergymen or theologians to inquire about the nature of her spirits, instead relying solely on her own discernment and occasionally the advice of secular men such as the Dauphin.¹²⁶ When questioned about the nature of her spirits, she puts forth that they are angels because St. Michael told her they were, and she discerned through his words over time that he was indeed who he said he was. She also states that she believes they were angels because she, "...had the desire to believe it."¹²⁷ Such a statement was not reassuring to the inquisitors, who were also finding Joan increasingly uncooperative when asked to describe these spirits she claimed were angels and saints.¹²⁸

Joan also regularly refused to speak about what promises her spirits had made to her, while admitting that they had indeed promised more than just Heaven.¹²⁹ Thus, the inquisitors found themselves dealing with mysterious spirits who refused to allow themselves to be described, mostly refused to show a sign of their influence; spirits whose host had refused to go to the clergy to inquire about their nature, and who apparently were also making promises to the host she was unwilling to divulge to the Church. Considering writings such as those of St. John on the similar powers of demons and angels, the inquisitors would certainly find ample cause for suspicion with Joan.¹³⁰

Her inquisitors even address claims that Joan has made prophecies that have not come to pass, such as rousing support for battles she did not win. Such failed prophecies would be considered demonic in nature. Joan, however, claimed such battles were never her enacting prophecies, she was merely acting on the requests of her soldiers or king. She claims to have done such things unwillingly, for she doubted the likelihood of their

¹²⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 121, 201.

¹²⁷ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 187.

¹²⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 202, 224, 227.

¹²⁹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 228.

¹³⁰ St. John of Damascus, "De fide orthodoxa," 42.

success, as compared to the things commanded of her by her spirits, which always came to pass. However, for her inquisitors, the theological precedents for divine and demonic prophecies would weaken such an argument.¹³¹

Furthermore, if her spirits were indeed good, the inquisitors note that she has admitted to deviating several times from their commands. Joan openly states that she was ordered not to jump out the window by her voices, while in a tower at Beaurevoir, before being captured, yet she did so anyways. If these were truly the commands of God, then it would follow that violating these orders would mean she was violating the will of God. Such a violation would constitute a sin, yet Joan then tells the inquisitors, repeatedly, that she knows how to atone for such things. According to her, her spirits subsequently forgave her for her violations, and knew that her soul was safe.¹³² Such information, as later pointed out by her inquisitors, directly contradicts scripture, which posits that none know whether they are free from sin or not. As noted with the cases of Marguerite and Ermine, scripture is a key tool for discerning not only spirits but heresy, and Joan's violation of it would be a damning offense.¹³³

Recalling *De quadam puella*, the inquisitors also question the temporal goods Joan has obtained via her spirits. Her prophesizing has granted her soldiers, officers, horses, money, and political status. Joan states that others have given such items through their good grace, particularly the Dauphin. According to Joan, she herself has never asked for such things aside from those necessary to enact her prophecies, such as a basic horse, or money for lodging. However, for the inquisitors, familiar with theological writings on

¹³¹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 219.

¹³² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 190-191.

¹³³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 235.

the nature of false prophets, amassing temporal wealth and worldly power align solidly with demonic influences or the practices of greedy charlatans.¹³⁴

Also concerning to her inquisitors was Joan's influence on the people of France. According to the inquisitors, she was being openly worshipped as a saint, in many places she was more popularly worshipped than canonical saints, and some were even calling her an angel. They deem these harmful activities, and that venerating a false prophet in such a manner could hurt these people's chances of salvation, yet Joan has done nothing to stop it. Though she did little to promote it occurring, she also did little to convince people to cease such worship. As with Marguerite's circulation of her book and Guiard's followers, this is a very damning issue in the eyes of the inquisition. After all, it harms not just Joan, but other Christians as well, who, beguiled by Joan's prophecies and actions have fallen off the proper path in the eyes of the Church.¹³⁵

In addition to the populace's admiration of Joan, the inquisitors fear that she will incite not just veneration but mimicry, and cause an increase in the number of false prophets. According to them, her actions have already been subverting the authority of the Church and causing good people to stray from its fold. Subversion makes it easier for more false prophets to gain power and influence, and weaken the Church still further, causing a major crisis. If Joan is not stopped, according to the inquisitors, it will make a fertile ground for heresy to grow. Such a problem must be nipped in the bud, immediately, as part of their inquisitorial duty. The inquisitor's claims echo the writings

¹³⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 216-217; Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204.

¹³⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 214.

of Henry of Langenstein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson, and their call for better discernment of prophets after the Great Schism.¹³⁶

Following the idea that she is subverting the Church's power, what will become a repeated issue for the inquisitors throughout the trial is Joan's refusal to submit to the Church Militant. The Catholic Church consisted of three parts; the Church Militant, God's earthly servants, those who enacted his will in this life. The other two parts were the Church Penitent, which was essentially the souls in Purgatory, and the Church Triumphant, or God and those Christians who were in heaven. To her inquisitors, Joan was subverting their power and duty as members of the Church Militant by insisting she only answered to the Church Triumphant, God himself. In many ways it seems that Joan either did not fully understand or did not care for the concept of the Church Militant. Despite her inquisitors' explanations, she seems to have found it as a separate entity to God's will, rather than the enactor of his will on Earth. One that was temporal and human, prone to human failings and earthly concerns. She continually agreed to obey the Church Militant, but only if she had first accomplished what her spirits told her God wanted. To her inquisitors, this meant that she would violate the laws of the Church Militant, and therefore God, at the behest of her spirits, which they were quickly determining to be evil in nature. After all, as Jean le Graveur had displayed with Ermine's case, demons regularly attempt to separate lay people from the influence of the clergy. Joan's refusal to submit to the clergy and instead trust solely on her voices is quite reminiscent to the desires of Ermine's demons.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 234.

¹³⁷ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 230-233.

Lastly, members of this inquisition that consisted solely of men, all who maintained some authoritative position in society, raised the issue of Joan's deeds not befitting her gender. They stated that she had gone against God by taking authority as a captain over soldiers, many of whom were of royal and noble bloodlines, essentially usurping the natural social order.¹³⁸ In addition, she regularly employed men to serve her, and allowed them into her personal offices with no other women around, something deemed improper for a good Christian woman. Joan counters that she only slept in areas where other women were present, or did not remove her armor, and points out that the government was run by men, and thus to interact with the government meant having to interact with men.¹³⁹ Valid arguments, but for male theologians and clergymen in a post-Great Schism society, attempting to handle Hildegard's effeminate age and maintain their positions of authority, Joan's gender and neglect of traditional roles was deeply concerning. Furthermore, as Gerson had pointed out in *De quadam puella*, the female prophets of scripture still maintained feminine airs, contrary to Joan. For Joan's inquisitors, she was yet again violating Scriptural examples.¹⁴⁰

Joan's inquisitors would pare the proceedings down into twelve assertions for the University of Paris to examine and respond to with their opinions. Much like William of Paris sending excerpts from Marguerite's book, Joan's inquisitors sent these assertions rather than the entire trial transcription. Also like William, they undoubtedly sent the most damning claims, but would not have struggled to find such problematic claims. The first article described her claims that she was visited by St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Margaret, and St. Catherine, and her interactions with them, as well as the commands

¹³⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 215.

¹³⁹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 216.

¹⁴⁰ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204-205.

they supposedly gave her. It also discusses her refusal to properly submit to the Church Militant, and her declared knowledge of certain salvation for herself.¹⁴¹

The second assertion discusses the sign she claims was shown to her by her spirits to determine who the king of Paris was, and that many angels were apparently in attendance to witness this event. Joan's contradicting statements on whether others or just she and the king saw the sign are pointed out as well.¹⁴² The third goes back to her spirits, discussing her certainty that it was St. Michael who visited her, and because of this assurance her conviction about the identities of her other spirits. It also recounts her ability to tell the difference between her different spirits, even though she cannot always see their faces.¹⁴³

Next the inquisitors discuss her prophecies, and her knowledge of secret things and people she has never met before. Her spirits tell her what will come to pass, identify strangers for her, and tell her where to find certain things.¹⁴⁴ The fifth assertion, recalling *De quadam puella*, is about Joan's wearing of men's clothing, and cutting her hair into a man's style. Her inquisitors point out that she has received the Eucharist several times in such attire, and that currently, despite their best efforts to convince her, she refuses to wear women's attire, even when receiving Communion. In fact, she has stated she would rather die than give up men's clothing, unless her God commanded it.¹⁴⁵

The sixth assertion describes the nature and style of the letters she sent to others, particularly her use of religious iconography and threats of violence. The inquisitors are troubled by her threats to enact God's will through violent means, and her threats of

¹⁴¹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 242-244.

¹⁴² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 244-245.

¹⁴³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 245.

¹⁴⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 245-246.

¹⁴⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 246-247; Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204-205

punishing those who do not do her bidding with death are also concerning to them.¹⁴⁶

Then the inquisitors discuss her leaving her parents without their knowledge, and convincing a local captain to give her the means to reach the Dauphin- he did so, and upon arriving at the Dauphin's place, she announced that she had been sent by God to lead armies for France's victory.¹⁴⁷

The next two assertions discuss her supposed knowledge of her own salvation. In assertion eight, when her leap from the tower in Beaurevoir ended, she admitted that it was against the commands of her spirits. She claims that her spirits forgave her, and knows for certain that they did. Then in assertion nine, her claim that she cannot be in mortal sin because otherwise the saints would not visit her is addressed. Her certainty that by preserving her virginity as instructed, she would be led to Heaven is also noted.¹⁴⁸ Following this theme, assertion ten addresses her statements that she knows who God loves, by pointing out individuals and asking her spirits about them. Therefore, she not only has knowledge of her own salvation, but apparently that of others as well. Additionally, her spirits speak in French and not English because the saints are, according to her, not on the side of the English.¹⁴⁹

Further discussing her spirits, assertion eleven directly touches on the discernment issue. It details her confidence in the nature of her spirits, despite the fact that she did not go to any clergymen or even her parents for aid in discerning them. Instead she fully believes them to be good spirits, and their word is the word of God. Also, she claims that should an evil spirit attempt to disguise itself as one of her spirits, she would be able to

¹⁴⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 247.

¹⁴⁷ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 247-248.

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 248.

¹⁴⁹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 248.

tell easily.¹⁵⁰ Assertion twelve, the last one, describes her refusal to submit to the Church Militant, to adhere to the doctrine explicated in the papal bull, *Unam Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam*, and acknowledge that the Church engineers God's will on Earth. Rather, they say that she insists she adheres to God's will alone, and relies solely on what he tells her through her spirits, even for answers in the trial.¹⁵¹

After the assertions were drawn up, they were submitted to the faculty of the University of Paris for their opinions. Meanwhile, Joan's inquisitors provided their opinions for the trial so far. Throughout these deliberations the Discernment of Spirits is used to provide arguments for why the inquisitors did not trust Joan's spirits and ultimately deemed them evil. Arguments already made by theologians such as Gerson appear again in these deliberations, particularly in regard to the origins of Joan's prophecies, and her wearing of men's clothes. Her refusal to submit to the Church for any reason is also a major argument, as such defiance seemed suspiciously like once orchestrated by demonic influence.¹⁵²

Joan of Arc Trial Deliberations

The first deliberation of Joan's inquisitors was produced as a joint effort, and immediately addresses the Discernment of Spirits. The inquisitors designate Joan's spirits as either false or evil in nature, stating that she has clearly not discerned them well. She has disobeyed her parents, committed idolatry, taken up men's clothing, incited violence, and refused to submit to the Church, all apparently at the behest of these spirits.

Furthermore, her insistence that they are good spirits, mainly because she has determined

¹⁵⁰ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 249.

¹⁵¹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 250.

¹⁵² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 253.

that and wants to believe it, with no clerical scrutiny for assistance, indicates that she has strayed from the Christian path.¹⁵³ Inquisitor Raoul Le Sauvage also addresses her claims that her spirits are good, recalling St. John of Damascus' warnings by stating, "...evil spirits sometimes counterfeit the appearance of good angels."¹⁵⁴

The opinion of the inquisitor Denis Gastinel, a master of civil and canon law, ties the case very strongly to the issues of Hildegard's argument about an effeminate age. He vehemently describes Joan as taking, "...herself for an authority, a doctor and a judge," despite the questionable nature of her faith.¹⁵⁵ Further recalling Hildegard's words, as well as the example of Bridget of Sweden, Joan is repeatedly called "schismatical" by inquisitors such as Gastinel.¹⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, a popular female mystic who claimed to enact God's will on Earth while completely bypassing the power of the Church Militant, and the men who served it, would evoke echoes of Bridget, and her role in the Schism would make Joan's case quite concerning. Furthermore, many previous authorities did not have good things to say about Bridget, so a similar case engendering the same kind of sentiment is unsurprising. Inquisitors familiar with the works of Henry of Langenstein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson had a precedent for dealing with cases such as Joan's, and it was not one beneficial to Joan.¹⁵⁷

Subsequent deliberations further undercut Joan's defense, and include indications of one further development in the technique of Discernment. Numerous opinions mention the specific lack of what becomes the first solid, admissible, proof for the existence of a

¹⁵³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 253-254.

¹⁵⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 281; St. John of Damascus, "De fide orthodoxa," 42.

¹⁵⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 255.

¹⁵⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 255, 281, 316, 317; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 36-78, 278-280; Obrist, "Saint Bridget," 232-237.

¹⁵⁷ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 284-289.

divine nature of spirits: miracles.¹⁵⁸ The nature of Joan's spirits is repeatedly questioned on the basis that Joan has performed no divine miracles to prove her claims. While she may have lifted sieges and won battles, she did so with an army of men fighting for her. She obtained supplies and equipment from the Dauphin with which to fight these battles. She recognizes people she has never seen before, yet it is possible, to her inquisitors, she could have previously asked for a description of these people prior to meeting them. While revelations are within God's power to grant, and are indeed something God has accorded humans in scripture, Joan has not provided the divine evidence that usually accompanies such revelations. Inquisitors Aubert Morel and Jean Duchemin, Masters of Canon Law sum it up succinctly in their joint opinion, stating, "...this woman has not confirmed them by miracle or testimony of Holy Writ, as there is no evidence for them, there is no reason to believe in the words and statements of this woman."¹⁵⁹ When discussing the difficulties of Discernment, Zanon of Liseux also posits miracles as a determining factor for the nature of spirits. He states that there is no reason to trust a person about their spirits, "...unless he is justified by the appearance of signs and miracles or by the special testimony of the scriptures."¹⁶⁰

Joan's lack of miracles also connected to her wearing of men's dress and Nicolas and Guillaume, abbots of Jumièges and Corneilles, respectively, used it to damn her further. Recalling Gerson's fifth proposition against Joan in *De quadam puella*, they argue that her wearing of men's dress being commanded by God is difficult to believe, as she has performed no miracles while wearing it.¹⁶¹ Morel and Duchemin also touch on

¹⁵⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 256, 268, 271, 276, 279.

¹⁵⁹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 268.

¹⁶⁰ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 276.

¹⁶¹ Gerson, "De quadam puella," 204-205; Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 278-279.

this, stating that she decided upon it herself, alone, and it is hard to believe God decreed it, as she has given no proof.¹⁶² Furthermore, they find that her decision is unbefitting a proper Christian woman leading a good life, describing it as, "...against both the honor and repute of her sex as well as good manner of life."¹⁶³ The advocates of the court of Rouen follow their ideas and bring up the withholding of Communion for her choice of attire. They point out that not only has she performed no miracles while dressed as a man, but her insistent refusal to wear women's clothes to receive Communion is acting directly against scripture and the will of God. In addition, they bring up the possibility of excommunicating her for her refusal, much like William of Paris did to Marguerite.¹⁶⁴

If one were to wonder what kind of miracles Joan could have possibly performed to convince her inquisitors otherwise, the answer can be found amongst the opinions of the University of Paris, to which we now turn. First, the Faculty of Theology's deliberations were read, a total of twelve, one corresponding to each of the twelve assertions against Joan. The Faculty of Decrees submitted only six deliberations, though they follow much the same rhetoric as those of the Faculty of Theology. Some of the faculty would expound upon their deliberations separately, but overall they appeared to be in agreement about their judgment.¹⁶⁵

The Theology Faculty, much like Joan's inquisitors, immediately deemed her spirits demonic in origin. They state that her claims, actions, and general attitude are, "...proceeding from evil or diabolical spirits, such as Belial, Satan and Behemoth."¹⁶⁶ They then purport that her claims that angels showed her a sign to reveal the Dauphin

¹⁶² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 268.

¹⁶³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 269.

¹⁶⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 271-272.

¹⁶⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 306, 314-322.

¹⁶⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 314.

was a lie, and that it besmirches angels to tell such a lie. The Faculty, much like her inquisitors, also take issue with her claims about St. Michael visiting her, asserting that she believed too easily it was him, and that she has acted rashly by doing so. She has provided insufficient signs to prove it was him, and overall was quite foolish. The fourth deliberation attacks her claims that her prophecies would come to pass, that her spirits told her who people were, and that she could find hidden things. The Theology Faculty deems these claims superstitious and boastful, and entirely unbelievable.¹⁶⁷

With the fifth deliberation they address her wearing of men's clothing and refusal to change into feminine attire to take Communion, deeming her blasphemous and violating Church doctrine and God's will. They even claim, "...she has imitated the rites of the heathen," by obstinately insisting on maintaining such attire.¹⁶⁸ Then they address her letters and threats, stating she is bloodthirsty and is, again, violating God's will with her actions. Deliberation number seven addresses her leaving her parents' house, stating such a thing was, "...contemptuous of the commandment to honor her father and mother."¹⁶⁹ By undertaking such an action she violated the commandments of God. Furthermore, her promises to people she encountered, particularly the Dauphin, are considered reckless.¹⁷⁰

The eighth deliberation sees the Faculty describing Joan as suicidal in regards to the leap from the tower, and erroneous in both how sin works and the state of men's free will. Deliberation nine follows this theme, but points out that her statements that she has lived free from sin because she has followed the commands of her spirits directly

¹⁶⁷ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 314-315.

¹⁶⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 315.

¹⁶⁹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 315.

¹⁷⁰ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 315.

contradicts her previous statement. After all, jumping from the tower against the commands of her spirits meant she had committed a sin by violating what she claims is the word of God, and she had to be forgiven for this sin. Thus she cannot be living without sin if she clearly states she then committed one.¹⁷¹

The Faculty of Theology then states that Joan's claims about her spirits telling her who God loves if she asks, is blasphemous towards St. Catherine and St. Margaret. She is essentially assigning her will and her beliefs to the saints, and using this to trick people. Furthermore, claiming that they do not speak English because the English are not loved by God is deemed a, "...transgression of the commandment to love her neighbor."¹⁷² Deliberation eleven addresses her spirits, and her claimed knowledge of the nature of her spirits, putting forth that she summons evil spirits, makes foolish pacts with them, and has generally strayed from the Church. The final deliberation connects directly to the first deliberation from the Faculty of Canon Law, as both call her, once more, schismatic. Her insistence upon not submitting to the Church Militant in the form of the admonishments of her inquisitors is evil, and she is attacking the authority of the Church.¹⁷³

The Faculty of Canon Law, after deeming her schismatic in their first deliberation, then state that she continues to violate *Unam Sanctum Ecclesiam Catholicam* with her refusal to submit to the Church. Citing St. Jerome, they equate Joan to a heretic, asserting, "...he who contradicts this article proves not only that he is ignorant, malicious and not Catholic, but heretical also."¹⁷⁴ They then address her clothes and haircut, claiming that she has become an apostate for her choices, which go against

¹⁷¹ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 315-316.

¹⁷² Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 316.

¹⁷³ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 316-317.

¹⁷⁴ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 317.

God's will. With the fourth deliberation her lack of miracles is expounded upon, citing the biblical example of Moses. The canonists describe Moses giving the Israelites in Egypt, "...a sign so that they might believe he was sent from God: he changed a rod into a serpent and a serpent into a rod." When the inquisitors and university doctors speak of miracles, they expect strange and implausible events, things that could not be done normally. These men are not as lenient as Jean Gerson was in his first conclusions about Ermine de Reims and ascribing her actions as miraculous. Winning battles with an army is a common occurrence, not a divine one, and these men need an indisputably divine sign. They also point out that Joan has no scriptural basis for her actions, unlike their example of John the Baptist, who connected his mission to Biblical precedents. It is in this deliberation as well that Joan is declared a witch by the faculty, a term that will gain increasing use in coming years, especially with the publishing of treatises such as Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (*The Anthill*) in the mid-fourteen thirties.¹⁷⁵

The fifth deliberation from the Faculty of Decrees points out that Joan has not only repeatedly broken Church law, but she continues to do so, and refuses to submit. Such actions, according to the faculty, have already caused her to fall off the path, and her continued actions are only making her situation worse. Her refusal to submit to the Church, even after repeated attempts to return her to the fold, has become heretical. Lastly, the faculty posits that her insistence that she knows she will be admitted to Heaven is, as stated by her inquisitors, another violation of God's teachings. They conclude this deliberation by, much like her inquisitors, calling for her to abjure her

¹⁷⁵ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 317-318; Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins, and François V. Pageau, eds., *The Arras Witch Treatises*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016, 8.

position, to recant and return to the fold, or suffer the punishment deemed appropriate for her crimes.¹⁷⁶

While Joan did recant the first time she appeared before the stake, it would not last, and she would ultimately be burned as a heretic and witch. In particular, it would seem her inquisitors actually took the most offense to her relapse, having had her swear while on the scaffold that she would abjure her claims and practices. Now she was claiming to once more hear her spirits, and had resumed wearing men's clothing, all while telling her inquisitors that she never intended to abjure.¹⁷⁷ Naturally, they believed she had relapsed, and like most relapsed heretics, death was the appropriate punishment, for clearly she refused to remain on the proper Christian path. Thus, like Marguerite a hundred years before, Joan was burned at the stake on Wednesday, May 30th, 1431.¹⁷⁸

The Trial of Joan of Arc and Discernment

In truth, the convoluted nature of Joan's trial reflects the convoluted nature of the Discernment of Spirits. Despite inquisitors and theologians best efforts to develop it into a straightforward method, the nebulous nature of the subject made things difficult. Deborah Fraoli describes the difficulties of Joan's inquisitors, stating, "Because her divine inspiration was self-proclaimed, the problem lay in how to evaluate her declaration."¹⁷⁹ Joan's inquisitors were attempting to use reason and an evidence based trial method to understand unseen spiritual matters. None of Joan's inquisitors could hear or see her spirits, they saw none of the signs she purported to see. Her answers about her

¹⁷⁶ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 318-320.

¹⁷⁷ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 348-358.

¹⁷⁸ Barrett, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 358-359.

¹⁷⁹ Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 2.

spirits were defensive, and the inquisitors struggled to gain adequate knowledge of them from her. With the details they could obtain, they applied their knowledge as best they could. Much like in *De quadam puella*, or even Bernard Gui's manual, they utilized centuries of not only scripture but theological texts and previous discernment cases to determine how best to explain a supernatural case.

However, despite the difficulties of the trial, Joan's inquisitors displayed throughout the proceedings what evidence was used for a Discernment decision. Joan's inquisitors repeatedly asked for descriptions of her spirits, how they looked, how they sounded, and the manner in which they appeared. Did it line up with the Scriptural descriptions of angels? Could not demons take angelic forms to fool people? They found insufficient evidence, so asked about her interactions with them. What was discussed, what did they promise, how did they deliver their prophecies? How much influence did they have on the things she said? Unfortunately for Joan, her stubborn refusals to divulge things such as what her spirits promised her immediately raised red flags. Her evasive answers about her prophecies, coupled with the boasting she did for those she would speak of, raised even more concern. Her admittance that she never sought the guidance of her parents or the clergy about the nature of her spirits was alarming to her inquisitors. They could only work with what she said about her spirits and her actions taken at their supposed command, and she was not exactly forthcoming with information.

As for the actions she claims to have committed at the behest of her spirits, her inquisitors found even more cause for concern. In direct violation of scripture, she took up men's clothing, adopted a man's haircut, and even took up arms. She also refused to quit this practice, claiming it was the will of God, commanded through her spirits. Even

when her inquisitors withheld Communion from her for her attire, she still did not bend to their will. Her inquisitors clearly found her staunch refusal to adhere to Church doctrines a demonic influence, for as shown in Ermine's case, demons repeatedly questioned the validity of Church doctrines. In general, her refusal to submit to the Church Militant, despite her inquisitors attempts to explain it to her, was highly damning. Her insistence that she only answered to her spirits, whom she believed to deliver God's will, and to not obey Church commands strongly suggested demonic influence. After all, why would the will of God and the will of his Church be different, and why would he command someone to defy his Church?

Additionally, actions such as leaving her parents, sending threatening letters in the name of God, and claiming she knows who God does and does not love all violated Church doctrines. And there were also certain actions lacking: miracles were repeatedly brought up by her inquisitors and others involved in the case, specifically her lack of creating miracles. While Joan might have believed her military victories were a divine enactment, to her inquisitors it was anything but. Winning battles was not outside the realm of man's capabilities, especially when one had armies of thousands of troops at their command. While Jean Gerson had once called for a willingness to accept miracles to strengthen faith in the Church, even he had recanted such ideas when faced with the increasing amount of female mystics by Joan's time. No, her inquisitors wanted something genuinely, irrevocably divine. Something that left no room for doubt that it could only be done by divine will, such as Moses' transformation of a rod into a living creature. And where Joan was concerned, they had none.

Likewise, in the eyes of her inquisitors, Joan had failed to perform another action they deemed important- curbing the adulation of her amongst the populace of France. While she may not have actively encouraged people to revere her, she also did little to admonish them for it, which concerned her inquisitors. Much like Marguerite and Guiard spreading their ideas around, Joan's adoration was a problem for inquisitors. After all, now, if Joan truly was a heretic, and the people of France were worshipping her, she had damned more than just her soul. For the inquisitors, whose job it was to stop the spread of heresy, this was a terrifying situation, as it meant a large portion of France were now in violation of the Church. Such a situation would be a terrible failure for the inquisition.

The nature of Joan's case also fit into Hildegard's notion of the effeminate age, with powerful female prophets usurping the authority of the clergy. Unfortunately for Joan, this set a negative precedent, with her case coming after the writings of men like Henry of Langenstein and Pierre d'Ailly. For men of the Church in the time immediately after the Schism, female mystics and their prophecies were highly concerning. And here was a woman who had donned men's clothing, took up weapons, and commanded thousands of male soldiers to fight for her. As Deborah Fraoli points out, theologians involved in Joan's trial, "...were to remain seriously perplexed by the Maid's masculine role and its relationship to divine inspiration."¹⁸⁰ By doing what she had, Joan had gone against scripture, and against the social order of the time. Her inquisitors would have been quite familiar with the cases of Bridget and Catherine, and other female mystics, as well as the response to them from theologians. Their response to Joan is unsurprising, as it falls within the narrative already established for the Discernment of Spirits at this time.

¹⁸⁰Fraoli, *Joan of Arc*, 3.

Conclusion

While the use of discernment as a legal method for determining heresy is a far cry from the original intentions of early Church men, it firmly displays the creativity of the inquisition in the High Middle Ages. Faced with a variety of spiritual practices, many of which ran counter to Church doctrine, these men needed tools to combat the growing threat of heresy. While utilizing a logical method for determining the nature of spiritual claims was fraught with difficulties, inquisitors used everything at their disposal to make the technique work. Deborah Fraoli best sums up the inquisition's use of the Discernment of Spirits, stating that "...despite the magnitude and uncertainty of the task, the clergy believed it their responsibility to determine what Christians should believe in cases of self-proclaimed prophets,".¹⁸¹

Early precedents for inquisitorial methodology set by William of Paris and Bernard Gui established the constant growth of the inquisition. Trials such as Marguerite's displayed not only common problems for inquisitors, such as the circulation of heretical materials, but their ability to come up with flexible solutions to these problems. William's use of theologians for determining the nature of Marguerite's book led to a new practice, one which greatly benefited the Discernment of Spirits technique. Connecting the University of Paris and the inquisition allowed men such as Jean Gerson to expand upon the Discernment technique, and exemplify how best to use it. Furthermore, with the growing reliance upon theological texts by inquisitors, men like Jean le Graveur could contribute to the Discernment narrative as well, utilizing Ermine's visions to add to the discourse. Fear and humility became noted aspects of the

¹⁸¹ Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 3.

Discernment technique, as displayed by Joan's trial and her interactions with her spirits and inquisitors.

Despite these developments, inquisitors still grappled with the difficulties of empirically testing faith based matters, as exemplified by Joan's trial. A hundred years had passed since William of Paris and Bernard Gui, and still they found themselves struggling. The similarities of demonic and divine abilities found within scripture and theological writings such as those of St. John of Damascus made for a problematic situation. Furthermore, as Gui had warned, heretics and those examined during inquisitorial trials were not always straightforward with answers. Joan regularly refused to answer, and claimed it was at the behest of her voices. Inquisitors had to carefully consider what information they did have, and discern whether it was trustworthy. In addition, they suffered biases from personal, political, and social issues of the time, which could easily cloud their judgement. Divorcing themselves from their personal convictions, especially in regards to their faith, was no easy task. To make matters worse, as female mysticism found itself on the rise, inquisitors were faced with a growing threat to their own spiritual authority. Tasked with keeping heresy in check, the widespread idealization of women such as Joan was severely concerning. These educated, prominent churchmen and scholars were finding not only their faith being tested, but their status as reliable spiritual guides for the laity as well.

Faced with the growth in female mysticism, inquisitors were finding the laity's ability to discern the nature of spirits seriously lacking. Thus, it was up to them to discern these spirits instead, regardless of how difficult it was. Their job was to combat heresy, no matter the difficulty, so they did. They familiarized themselves with hundreds of

years' worth of theological texts, relied on scripture, sought for proof in the form of miracles, and chastised clear violations of Church doctrines. While they regularly found themselves facing challenges such as Joan, they continued to refine techniques such as the Discernment of Spirits to carefully analyze and determine trial outcomes. Remaining resourceful and ingenious, they combated heresy to the best of their abilities throughout the High Middle Ages.

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