THE MIRROR OF SIMPLE SOULS:
THE ETHICS OF MARGARET PORETTE

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To an essay that was concerned with Margaret Porette, Meister Eckhart, and John Ruusbroec and that had been delivered as a lecture at a scholarly...
conference in Leuven in 1981. Dr. Maria Lichtmann responded in 1993 at a gathering held at the University of Western Michigan:

Although Edmund Colledge has traced the themes of Meister Eckhart’s sermon, the *Beati pauperes spiritu*, back to Marguerite, in the process he has disparaged her work and its influence on Eckhart. In calling her the “high priestess of ‘liberty of the spirit,’” and accusing her of being a “Valentinian Gnostic,” Colledge displays the tendency of several modern interpreters to stand with her inquisitors in condemning Marguerite anew.

Dr. Lichtmann did not identify the “several modern interpreters” but her assertion that Professor Colledge was, somewhat after the fact, an accessory of the inquisitors by whom Margaret Porette had been tried and convicted as a relapsed heretic merits consideration and response. Even if some of the claims in *The Mirror of Simple Souls* are, as its author had intended, quite beyond reason, Dr. Lichtmann furnished neither grounds by which to believe that the text should be privileged against criticism nor any by which to think that Professor Colledge was attentive to the text for reasons no better than that of validating the *argumentum ad baculum* that the inquisition had deployed.

In her essay, as proof of the “tendency” that she attributed to Professor Colledge, Dr. Lichtmann only cited the report that he and I had jointly written and presented, on 18 May 1981, to the Eleventh International

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3 There were two sessions, at the Twenty-Eighth International Congress on Medieval Studies, on the campus of the University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo, 6–9 May 1993, devoted to “Eckhart and the Women Mystics” at one of which Dr. Lichtmann read her paper.


In 2007, Dr. Francesca Caroline Bussey submitted her dissertation, “*The World on the End of a Reed:* Marguerite Porete and the Annihilation of an Identity in Medieval and Modern Representations—A Reassesment,” to the Department of History in the University of Sydney. This work, supervised by Professor John O. Ward, furnishes much the same criticism as that of Dr. Lichtmann, though in somewhat better detail.