INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENCE OF MEISTER ECKHART

TO BECOME ACQUAINTED with the writing of Eckhart of Hochheim, a master of our inner atmosphere, is to be surprised. Looking hack at him and his thought from the perspective of seven centuries, we see in Eckhart not one intellectual world but several, and each is still present in our own time. There is the methodology of scholastic philosophy as well as the theology and the commentaries on the _Fathers and the Scriptures; there are the booklets for the life of the spirit, and especially, the brief but potent sermons. As a Dominican he was devoted to his brothers, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, hut the dominant philosophical framework of his thought is not that of Aristote1ianism (new to the West) but that of the Neo-Platonism preserved in the mystics of the Greek Church. Eckhart is a Catholic spiritual director; yet, his ideas resemble at times those of the German idealists while his language can be existentialist.

Eckhart was a medieVial scholastic as well as a mystic. A university professor at home in the intellectual world of the thirteenth century, he was nonetheless a preacher and counselor concerning the inner spaces where communion with God touches possibility. *Magister* at the centers of academic life, Cologne and Paris, nevertheless he is famous because of his preaching to monasteries of cloistered nuns who were part of the movement towards a new spirituality. Meister Eckhart was an innovator in the desert of mystical prayer, as he called it (and for his original phraseology he was condemned by episcopal and papal authorities), but he was also a church

administrator, a prior and a provincial of large and needy territories of the Dominican Order.

If we are surprised at the variety of the activity of the *Lesemeister* (as the *Magister in theolor}ia* was called in medieval Germany), no less astonishing is his influence which lasted not merely for generations but endured from epoch to epoch pasSJing through Luther, Schopenhauer and Heidegger. From his first generation of students, somewhat bewildered and intimidated by the papal condemnation, two became famous mentors of spiritual theology: Tauler and Suso. Through the writings of Tauler (some of which held not only the ideas but the text of Eckhart) and the *Theolog'ia deutsoh* Luther (a Thuringian like Eckhart) gained strength and insight for pursuing his new pastoral and national approach to the Word of Christianity. In some sense Luther's reformation was not only biblical and ecclesial-political but mystical; it grew from an experience of God's sovereign word of existential forgiveness in Christ. It preferred over against the ossified Hellenism and scholasticism of the late Middle Ages not only the Scriptural Word but that Word as received in the open and yearning soul.

When Schelling and Hegel were shown the writings of Eckhart by that extraordinary seminal thinker of the early nineteenth century, Franz von Baader, they were astonished that here was someone who had anticipated their own ideas on the nature of the absolute. Hegel praised Eckhart as exceeding all the mystics upon whom idealism could draw, while Schelling recognized that Eckhart was not only a religious genius. but a creator of speculative terminology.[1] It is really with the German Romantics that the modern rediscovery of Eckhart, which is still continuing, began.[2]

[1] Heidegger writes of Schelling's *Essay on Freedom:* "Here the entire daring of Schelling's thought enters ... the realization of an intellectual position which emerges with Meister Eckhart and which finds in Jacob Boehme a unique deV'elopment." *Schelling/! Abhandlung Uber das Wesen der memchlichen Freiheit* (1809) (Tiibingen, 1971), p. 140.

[2] See I. Degenhardt, *Studien zum Wandel des Eckhartbildes* (Leiden, 1967).

It is no coincidence that one of the important philosophical meditations of Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit,* derives its title from Eckhart. Reiner Schiirmann's and John Caputo's writings have shown the similarity in language and intent between the two thinkers, certainly a similarity modified by the different worlds they inhabited. There are different objects and goals for their paths of detachment but Heidegger cherished his reading of Eckhart. "The breadth of all growing things which rest along the pathway bestows world. In what remains unsaid in their speech is-as Eckhart, the old master of letter and life, says-God, only God." [3]

While German idealism and existentialism have been influenced by the Dominican mystic, since the turbulent 1960's our culture has recorded more and more searches towards interior experience, inner ease and community beyond the secular city. An American interest in Asiatic mysticism begun with Thomas Merton has continued to grow. We have learned of similarities between Eckhart and Zen.[4] The uncertainty of our times recalls the early fourteenth century: the same instability and frustrations, the same political harshness and personal anxiety. Eckhart stands as one who has had something to say about dropping-out of a society consumed by its own destructive self-will. The positive side of Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* and *Abgeschiedenheit* ("detachment" and" withdrawal") is strong selfhood and community. Community finds the ground of relationship with other persons to be full communion with one's self. At that diamond point of the self," the spark of the soul" *(Seelenfunkle'in)* each person can discover himself or herself borne up by the filial and generative love of the God beyond God.

While one can find recent studies on Eckhart and Indian religion,[5] Japanese Buddhism,[6] and Marxism,[7] it would appear

[3] " The Pathway," *Listening,* 2 (1967), 89.

[4] D. T. Suzuki, "Meister Eckhart and Zen," *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York, 1957).

[5] See H. Schomerus, *Meister Eckhart und Manikka-Vasagar. Mystik auf indischem und deutschem Boden* (Giitersloh, 1936).

that there was more material on Eckhart available in English fifteen years ago than is the case today.

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Eckhart's Life

Eckhart was born about 1260 at Hochheim not far from Gotha in Thuringia.[8] Rather young he entered the novitiate of the priory of the Order of Preachers in Erfurt. In 1277 he was a student at Paris in liberal arts and philosophy where he could witness firsthand the conflict raging around the ideas of Albert and Thomas (who had died in 1274). He began theological studies in Cologne about 1280, the year Albertus Magnus died. Thomas Aquinas had accompanied his teacher, Albert, to Cologne in 1248 to attend his lectures on Pseudo-Dionysius, a writer to be commented upon also by Aquinas and to exercise influence on Eckhart. In 1293 the Thuringian Dominican was in Paris as a young lecturer on the *Sentences.* We have a record that he preached the solemn academic sermon at Easter, 1294 on the text from *First Corinthians, "Pasoha nostrum immolatus est Christus"* (5: 7). In this sermon he refers to Albertus Magnus so familiarly that one can hardly escape the impression that Eckhart had studied under that master.[9] Upon his return from Paris he was made Prior of "*Erdfortt* " and Vicar Provincial of Thuringia. In 1302 he was given a professorship in Paris and from this time at the university and at the Dominican *Studium Generale* of St. Jacques we have his disputation on the ultimate nature of God.[10] A scholastic professor faithful to the Dominican tradition, he felt sufficiently free to differ with Aquinas on the

• See S. Ueda, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottkeit* (Glitersloh, 1965).

• See A. Haas, "Maitre Eckhart dans le miroir de l'ideologie marxiste," *La vie spirituelle,* 124 (1971),

[8] J. Koch, " Kritische Studien zum Leben Meister Eckharts," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum,* (1959), 1-51.

• T. Kaeppeli, "Praedicator monoculus. Sermons parisiens de la fin du XIDe siecle," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum,* (1957), 120-167.

[10] *Parisian Questions and Prologues,* A. Maurer, ed. (Toronto, 1974).

issue of the ultimate nature of God. Nevertheless, Eckhart singled out his " holy brother " Thomas Aquinas for special admiration and public discipleship.[11] In 1303 Eckhart was designated the first provincial of the newly-founded Dominican Province of Saxony which included forty-seven priories and reached from Thuringia to Holland. . Four years later, retaining his provincialate, he was made vicar of the Bohemian province. The general chapter of Naples did not approve the election of Eckhart to be provincial of the southern German province but sent him for a second time (the academic years 1311-1313) to teach at the University of Paris.

During this second regency in Paris Eckhart laid the foundations for what was to be his great work, the *Opus Tripartitum:* a synthesis rather than a *summa,* an intellectual symphony of scriptural commentaries, philosophico-theological questions and responses, and sermons on the interior life-all brought together in a new unity. Alois Dempf writes that "Thomas's most gifted student was Meister Eckhart. He is primarily an exegete · of the data of creation and redemption." [12]

In a charter dated 1314 there is a reference to *"Magister Eckehardus, professor sacre theologie."* From this we infer that he was a lector at one of the Dominican priories in Strassbourg in that year.

No other city in the Empire had a more active religious life than Strassbourg, with its glorious Gothic cathedral, its many churches and religious houses among which the nunneries outnumbered the friaries. There were no less than seven Dominican convents in the city. There was a great tradition of preaching in Strassbourg during the Middle Ages. Here Eckhart won widespread fame as a popular preacher, here the Friends of God had their most important centre, and here German mysticism reached the culminating point of its development. [13]

[11] "Thomas Aquinas was his model in teaching and in life." H. Fischer, "Thomas von Aquinas und Meister Eckhart," *Theologie und Philosophie,* 49 (1974)' 284.

[19] A. Dempf, " Gcistesgeschichtliche Dialektik der Theologien," *Philosophisches lahrbuch,* 73 (1966), 249.

[11] J. M. Clark, *Meister EckharfJ* (New York, 1957), p. 19.

Eckhart' s sermons and conferences in German gave a spectrum of interested hearers access to his ideas. He preached to Dominicans and Cistercians, lay people and fellow theologians, members of the nobility and artisans. Preaching and writing in the vernacular were the occasion for Eckhart to reveal another side of his genius as a creator of the German language. As with Catherine of Siena, and to a lesser extent John of the Cross, the mystic helped to fashion the vernacular.

Languages, German and Latin, divide Eckhart's works, and the history of the rediscovery of the man is the history of a posted conflict between linguistic worlds: the scholastic and the preacher, the teacher and the mystic. In fact, the scholastic disputes touch on the same theology of God as the sermons, while the Latin sermons show that their German counterparts are not so unusual. Nevertheless, while Latin is conducive to Eckhart's magisterial Neo-Platonism, it is in the dense power of his German that he reaches the heights.

We do not know the exact date but after Eckhart had moved up the Rhine to Cologne. There the Dominicans worked not only in the school of theology but in public preaching and especially with monasteries and movements caught up in the exploration of the interior life. Soon he felt the displeasure of the Archbishop and the envy of fellow religious. In the Archbishop of Cologne, Henry of Virneburg, opened proceedings to examine his positions, profound in their theological metaphysics but extreme in some of their expressions... and yet so widely preached to nuns, lay persons, and devotees. We have the acts of the process in Cologne. Eckhart felt that this trial was unfair and disparaging of the Order and, because of the privileges of the Dominicans, illegal. The Dominican pointed out that his reputation within and without the Order for decades had been one of faithfulness to the church; it was made manifest in his life and teaching. He refuted in a patiently, scholarly way texts and charges brought against him, pointing out that both Thomas and Albert had been accused of heresy and vindicated. While showing respect to the Archbishop he denounced the hostile Dominican wit-

nesses as publicly known to be worthy of little credence. 'I'herefore on January 24, 1327 he appealed to the Pope at Avignon. A few weeks later in the Dominican church in Cologne he explained publicly in a sermon in Latin and German what he was doing and why. Eckhart left for Avignon to defend himself before the commision set up by the Pope. He spent most of his remaining months at Avignon. We have the process from the papal curia along with Eckhart' s justification of his teaching. John XXII issued the apostolic constitution, *In Agro Dominico,*.on March 27, 1829, concluding that seventeen of the articles ascribed to Eckhart were to be construed as heretical and eleven to be supportive of heresy. The papal decision remarked that Eckhart had, prior to his death, rejected error and had submitted his teachings and writings to the See of Peter. Authorities presume that Eckhart of Hochheim died between 1827 and 1329 in Avignon or Cologne.

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Eokhart's Tlwught

No one could exert the diverse influence Eckhart has upon philosophers and theologians, monks and mystics without holding in his thought both genius and richness. And yet the interpretations and stimuli of his thinking fl.ow out of only a few ideas. The Latin and German works of ontology and spirituality complement each other. Like Eckhart's life what was to be his novel masterpiece, the *Opus Tripartitum,* was left unfinished, but like his writings on the interior life and the sermons, his inner voyage found the shore.

There is a single idea in Meister Eckhart's theology. His thought is *a religious metaphysics of spi,rit.* Everything focuses upon *Geist.* Spirit is twofold, that is, we find ourselves at the intersection of a dual process: in a dialogue between a searching self and an unseen presence; within a dialectic both ontic and redemptive between *our spi,rit* arul *the Spirit of God.* Behind creation is the divine mind with its activity and quiet sustenance. The human mind is the climax of creation for it is open to contact by the absolute Spirit.

Nature and imagination delight in variety, but beyond and within them is a dynamic leading towards unity: unity in the godhead, unity in the human self. Drawing upon the apophatic tradition of Neo-Platonic mysticism, Eckhart calls God " nothing," " wilderness," " darkness." Yet this void (which is the overabundance of being realized in thought) is richer and brighter than creation. For Eckhart the three persons of the Trinity are not the absolute, for they display differentiation and activity. Behind the Trinity and beneath the history of salvation lies the absolute godhead, out of time and space, ineffable because infinitely diverse from the being of creatures.

I will say something that I have never said before. God and the Godhead are as different as heaven and earth ... God and the Godhead are distinguished by working and not working.[14]

The second pole of this theology is the human spirit. By nature it is open to the voyage towards the godhead; by grace created spirit undertakes it in filiation. Eckhart is not content with defining God as being or cause but gives a new perspective to the human being, not as personhood or existence, but as spirit. Eckhart does not substitute a Plotinian mysticism for the Scriptures, but the message and reality of salvation-history point to a deeper level where Spirit effects in created spirit its further image. Justification by Christ is, then, ·an ontological participation in being-begotten as well as a redemption from moral disfigurement.

There is a point in the soul where its essence is so much spirit that it is open to transcendent possibilities. By the presence of God (which we name grace) the soul participates in a higher life. " It is only in the Holy Spirit that God is in us, and we are not in God except in the Holy Spirit, for 'being:..in' is not appropriate to the Father or the Son but only to the Holy Spirit." [16] Eckhart's theology of grace is not

[14] The sermon, "Nolite timere," in J. Quint, ed. *Meister Eckhart, Deutsche Predigten und Traktate* (Munich, 1972), p. 271.

[15] *Lateinische Werke,* IV, p. 26.

novel; it repeats the same teaching and classification as most of the rest of medieval theology. We recall here its place in Eckhart's sermons, many of which treat directly of grace. Still his apparent neglect to distinguish divine grace as something Christ-purchased from grace as simply created spirit has led readers to misunderstand him. While he frequently omits the distinction of nature and grace and speaks only of reason and the soul, still the reader sympathetic to him must presume that he means these realities *as elevated by grace* and thereby capable of enjoying the adoption of God, the detachment of the saint.

God's life is one of creative love pouring forth into Trinity, cosmos, spiritual selfhood, Incarnate head. Does Eckhart teach that this life imparted to the human spirit is the process of becoming an offspring of God in the same way that the Logos is the Son of God? The theologies of John and Paul can be summoned to witness that those born anew in grace are sons and daughters of God. Eckhart's *language* implies our filial generation to be the same as that of the Logos. The Dominican views the generation of the divine persons, the creation of the world, the spiritual and charismatic affiliation of men and women to be one in a timeless process of divine self-realization. In the sermon "*Ave, gratia plena*" he explains:

> "In the beginning." This gives us to understand that we are the only son whom the Father has eternally begotten out of the hidden darkness of the eternal mystery, remaining in the first beginning of primal purity, which is the fullness of all purity. Here I rested and slept eternally in the hidden knowledge of the eternal Father, indwelling and unspoken.[16]

Indwelling yet unspoken. Eckhart goes further: not only am I (in my eidetic existence in the active divinity) eternally begotten with the Logos and with creation but at the center of the self " the Father begets me as his only begotten Son and the same Son."[11] This sameness with the generation of the

[18] The sermon, "Ave, Gratia plena," in Clark, *Meist(!//' Eckhart,* p. ft14.
[17] *Deutsche Werke,* I, p. 109.

Logos and the incarnation of Jesus, though modestly supported by the traditional theologies of uncreated grace and Trinitarian indwelling, gained new force in Eckhart's words with, some would say, an unorthodox exaggeration.

If daring in its speculative dimension, this theology of spirit is simple and radically ordinary in its practical side. The ontology of the quiet being of the Godhead grounds an ascetical theology of the human will. If God is Being, creatures are The voyage to the true self and to union with the Godhead is a voyage through detachment from creatures with their contingency. Eckhart gave to intellectual history the words *Gelassenheit* (to let things be) and *Abgesohiedenheit* (to stand back, to withdraw, to be separate) .

> Light and darkness cannot exist together. God is the truth and a light in Himself. When God comes into this temple, He drives out ignorance, that is darkness, and reveals Himself through light and truth. [18]

Because of the Fall our will desires things around us, desires them more than our true self or God. Self-will drives us in the wrong directions. Eckhart is impatient with questions about what we should *do* to attain union with God. Self-will too easily changes its objects as it remains self-will. The compulsive will fashions a chain of its own activity. Regardless of how religious and moral our activities are, they do not guarantee that the will has found humble alignment with God. Activity flowing from a life and will in harmony with true self and the God who eschews any manipulation allows the birth of the Word in the soul.

The object of Eckhart's vision remained the Unnameable. On the one hand writers such as Colledge, Caputo, and Ashley ably defend the fidelity of this master of theology to medieval Roman Catholicism. And yet there is truth in the implication by Schiirmann that ultimately Eckhart's exploration of the world of the Godhead leads us beyond even Christianity. Eckhart had turned the *regio dissi,m'ilitudinis* of Augustine

[18] The sermon, "Intravit Jesus in templum," Clark, *Meister Eckhart,* p. US.

and Bernard around. No longer the realm of :finitude and sin, it became the non-being of the Godhead beyond God. Do we find there the ground of all religion, even of revelation?

> Now you are loving God as he is *God*, Spirit, person, image. All of that must disappear. "But how should I lov.e him?" You should love him as if he were a non-God, a non-spirit, a non-person, a non-image. No, even more, as a simple, pure, clear One, separated from all duality. And in this One we should eternally immerse ourselves, sinking from something to Nothing. Towards this may God help us. Amen.[19]

Eckhart was not a historian of the eschaton nor a historian of Christianity. Like his teachers he found metaphysics in history, divinity in psychology. For each believer whose faith is deepening into that grace-born insight called mystical, the gloom of aloneness and detachment gives signs of leading to what is sought. Eckhart and these essays have set out to explore that darkness of faith which is illumined by a pillar of cloud during the day and by a pillar of fire at night.

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[19] The sermon, "Renovamini spiritu," in Quint, *Meister Eckhart*, p. 855.

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

IN THE *LEGENDS,* the collection of stories and anecdotes about Meister Eckhart, it is recorded that " a priest once came to Meister Eckhart and said to him: ' I wish that your soul were in my body '. To which the Meister responded: 'You are really foolish. That would get you nowhere; it would accomplish as little as having your soul in my body. No soul can really do anything except through the body to which it is attached.'" [1] The 14th century background is the " body " to which the " soul " of Eckhart is attached. No age, and no person of that age, can really be understood except when studied in the context of the times to which he was attached.

Many challenging and valid comparisons can be made between the terrible Fourteenth Century and our own age. The persons and events of that century may have indeed a particular relevance for our own times. Yet these comparisons can only be validated after we understand Eckhart's age in itself. There are fashions in the writing and study of history. Some centuries are more popular than others. When the Middle Ages had become a respectable field of study, most historians chose to write about the 13th century. Another generation of historians thought the rnth century more interesting; still others found the 10th or 11th centuries more worthy of close examination. The 14th century-" the terrible times "-was, however, neglected. Catholics and medievalists saw it as a period of unfortunate decline and decay; rationalists and humanists saw in it only the birth-pangs of the glorious Renaissance ·and the resplendent modem world.

Two global wars, the overthrow of the Western and Atlantic

[1] Raymond M. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart: A Mode:m Translation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), p. 258.

political, economic and social order, the erosion of faith in the postulates of liberal and rational Western civilization, the rise of new powers, new ideologies and a half-century of violence, war, and terrorism have all conspired to re-direct our attention to the 14th century. Then medieval civilization was sapped from within, assaulted from without, and a great culture began to die, a marvelous synthesis of faith and learning slowly unravelled and came apart. There were population problems, economic depressions, demands for reforms and a merry dance of hedonists bent upon instant pleasure. It was a time when men and women began to think that the world was coming to an end. They were of course right: a world was coming to an end: the world of the Middle Ages.

Engelbert of Admont, at the beginning of the 14th century, saw parallels between his times and the end of the Roman Empire. He said that the Anti-Christ was near. He noted three "wounds" in the human soul that were draining the life-blood from Christendom: revolt against belief, revolt against authority, and revolt against the unity of Christian peoples. Engelbert could not see how these wounds could be healed and he prophesied the imminent end of the world.

Catherine of Siena was a child of the 14th century. In January of 1380, Catherine went to pray in the old St. Peter's basilica in Rome. She raised her eyes to the mosaic in the apse of the church, a mosaic that depicted the vessel of the Church tossing upon a raging sea. Catherine moaned and began to fall to the ground, unconscious. When she had recovered, her friends asked the reason for her distress. She replied that she had beheld the Church in a storm of such intensity that, even with the apostolic steersman at the helm, the waves seemed about to engulf the vessel. In a moment of agonized wonder she thought: can even God Himself prevent it from foundering? [2] The Sienese mystic's vision corresponded all too well to reality. In the 14th century, the winds of history had grown to a tempest. Men and women

[1] H. Daniel-Rops, *Cathedral and Crusade: Studies of the Medieval Church*, trans. J. Warrington (New York: Dutton, 1957), p. 28.

everywhere wondered if the Church, and the civilization it bore, were not headed for shipwreck.

Historians have endeavored to find causes for the distress. Friedrich Heer posits a closing of European society that had begun in the 13th century. "In the twelfth, and to a large extent still in the 13th century, Europe had the characteristics of an open society." The frontiers were fluid, traffic was free and there was" a corresponding internal fl.exibility."[3] Learning was liberal, popular piety took many forms and the Church itself was open. But in the late 13th century Europe became a closed society. There was an isolation both internally and externally. The Mongol deluge in the east, the rise of Turkish power in Asia Minor and eventually in the Balkans were only the most obvious external threats. Within Europe the great Empire had been effectively destroyed; the ideal of unity was being rapidly replaced by the reality of competitive dynastic kingdoms. The Church, now made aware of the shocking extent of heresy, began to combat that menace by means of clericalization and imposed uniformity and standardization. The tolerence of earlier centuries was replaced by fear and mounting hysteria.[4]

Historians have noted the succession of deaths of great men towards the close of the 13th century: Frederick II in Louis IX in 1270, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure in 1274; some have concluded it was the failure of the next generation in leadership.[5] Other historians pay more attention to political events: the rise of the new monarchies in France and England, the devastating wars of the 14th century. Or was it economics that was the basis of the changes, " the underlying condition for the discontent and the bitterness ... apparent in the later medieval period," noting the long economic depression caused

[8] Friedrich Heer, *Tke Medieval World: Europe 1100-1350,* trans. J. Sondheimer (New York: World, 1961), p. 19.

'Edward P. Cheyney, *Tke Dawn of a New Era: 1250-1453,* Rise of Modem Europe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1986), p. 1-2.

[6] Norman F. Cantor, *Medieval History: Tke Life and Deatk of a Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. /.146.

by population decline and soil exhaustion ... a depression that " explains the short temper and restlessness of the men of later medieval Europe." [6]

Since the great work by **J.** Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages,* in 1924, the popularity of a psychological explanation of an epoch has grown. Huizinga began his masterful study of " the fonns of life " in Northern Europe with this eloquent description:

> To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us. The contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking. All experience had yet to the minds of men the directness and absoluteness of the pleasure and pain of child-life.[7]

In treating of the life of the period, Huizinga again and again stressed " the violent contrasts and impressive forms" ; he marvelled at how violent and high-strung was life at that period and emphasized the emotional character of party sentiments, the blind passion of loyalty. He concluded: "so violent and motley was life that it bore the mixed smell of blood and of roses ... a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls." [8]

Norrnan Cantor, writing in the 1960's, took up this idea of a psychological answer to the question: Why did medieval civilization, which had been the creative work of so many centuries, disintegrate so suddenly and quickly? Detenninists, like Spengler, had insisted that civilizations are organisms which pass through a life-cycle: a creative spring, a brilliant summer, a mellowing autumn, and a dying winter. Cantor argued, however, that civilizations like human beings could develop a "will-to-die," a neurotic condition that medieval civilization after 1270 seems to exhibit.[9]

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 578.

[7] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 9.

[8] *Ibid.,* p.

[9] Cantor, *Medieval History,* p. 574.

Cantor explains the cause of this death-wish as "repression." The first seventy years of the thirteenth century witnessed strenuous attempts to resolve conflicts between science and religion, between authority and freedom, between the Church and the state. But after 1270, men could no longer maintain the line of subtle compromise. After 1270, men and women wanted "to end the complexity, the subtleties, the compromises, the intricacies of medieval civilization." [10] Maintaining it had become an intolerable burden. There began a search for a new identity.

To understand the search, one begins with the political climate of the times. In Germany, as Meister Eckhart was born in 1260, the "Great Interregnum" had already run for six years; it would last for another thirteen. This time of Empire without an Emperor was the epilogue to the struggle between Papacy and Empire, the coda that marked the effective end of the imperial idea and the triumph of particularism in Germany.

In 1266, Manfred, illegitimate son of the great Frederick II, was defeated and killed at the battle of Benevento. The Papacy had invited Charles of Anjou, brother and uncle of French kings, to take the southern kingdom of the Hohenstaufens. In 1268, Conradin, fifteen year-old grandson of Frederick II, was called by Italian Ghibellines to reclaim the inheritance of the Hohenstaufens. But the young man was defeated in battle and then betrayed into the hands of Charles of Anjou. He was then executed in the main square at Naples. The Pope approved the execution; Europe was shocked. Germany seethed at the outrage. Seven hundred years later, the poet Heine could still feel indignation at the crime which German patriots were not loath to call the greatest crime in history.

By 1280 Eckhart was a Dominican and a student of theology in Cologne. On Easter Monday, 1282, the people of Palermo rose against the rule of Charles of Anjou. This uprising, the famed "Sicilian Vespers," ignited revolution across Sicily. The

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 548.

French, men, women and children, were massacred. In Rome, the Pope issued excommunications against the rebels but to no avail. Seeking support from the King of Aragon, the Sicilians had ended the papally-blessed Angevin dream.

In U93 and U94, Eckhart was pursuing higher theological studies at the University of Paris. In Perugia, after a vacancy in the See of Peter for twenty-seven months, the cardinals elected a Benedictine hermit as pope: Celestine V. Christendom hailed the " evangelical pope," awaited since the prophecies of Joachim of Flora and the *Eternal Gospel.* But the reign lasted only from July until December 13th, when Celestine abdicated. His successor was the arrogant Boniface VIII- the " high-souled sinner " as Dante described him. Celestine died, imprisoned in the castle of Fumone, in U96. In 1313, when he was no longer an embarrasment, he was canonized.

While Eckhart was at Paris, Philip IV had been on the French throne since *U85;* he would remain there till his death in 1313. His challenge to the Papacy had been successful. Through his hired thugs, he had had one Pope killed, another poisoned and a third completely cowed. In 1302, while Eckhart lectured in Paris, Philip summoned the Estates General of the realm. With masterful ease he enlisted the support of French nobility, clergy and people against Boniface VIII. In the next years, Philip would expel the Jews from France, mobilize the power of the state and force of public opinion against a religious order, the Knights Templars, and destroy them-their leaders, their members and their reputation.

In the first and second decades of the fourteenth century, Eckhart was a preacher of fame in his native Germany. In those years, Church and State were troubled again by quarrels between an Emperor, Louis of Bavaria, and a Pope, John XXII. In 1328, the year of the Meister's death, the last of the Capetian kings in France died, the dynasty ending in a decade of scandal, sex, incompetence, and insanity.

In 1315, people had been terrified by the appearance of a comet; in *1325,* there was a conjunction of the planets Saturn and Jupiter. Astrologers predicted disaster. This time they

were right. Twelve years later, in 1387, the Hundred Years War between England and France began. In Avignon, the Popes settled down for a long stay, leaving their temporary quarters in the Dominican priory and building the vast and beautiful Papal Palace that still amazes. In 1848, the pandemic plague known as the Black Death first struck in Florence. It would soon devastate Italy, France, Germany, England, and Scandinavia. By 1350, when there was a respite, Europe counted a minimum of twenty-five million dead, a figure that possibly ran to fifty million.

Fifty years after Eckhart's death, the popes returned to Rome. But within months of that event, the Church was split over a papal election. The next quarter of a century was a distr&ssingtime of schism and separation. Cardinals schemed, theologians spun theories and the simple folk whipped themselves to blood and frenzy as the terrible fourteenth century came to an end. Men could no longer be sure of anything. The century was flickering out and so, it seemed, was human confidence. Everywhere there was less flame and less fervor. Vincent Ferrer found a continent ready to believe his report that God was ringing down the curtain on this whole sorry mess.

It would be difficult to prove that there was more violence in the fourteenth century than in other medieval centuries. But it is easy to see that contemporaries thought it was a new kind of violence. The execution of Conradin shocked Europe because it contradicted all the laws and customs of feudal warfare. The Sicilian Vespers were not the first massacre in European history but they did mark "a savage and important turning-point in the history of Sicily (and) ... taught a lesson to the whole of Europe" because it unleashed the fury of aroused *national* passions.[11] The struggle between Boniface VIII and Philip IV paralleled earlier Church-State confron-

[11] Steven Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespe1's: A of the Mediterranean World in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), p. 280.

tations, but the Capetian conducted it with a new mastery of statecraft, manipulation of public opinion, and amoral use of force.

A significant element in this new violence was the violence of language itself. The " incessant use of slander and calumny in debate had so debased the moral currency of Europe, that men were prepared to accept the most outlandish accusations, even against the popes." [12] Thus, the fantastic lies put out by Nogaret about Boniface VIII were believed by people, now bewildered by streams of constant accusation. Papal documents, for a century, had grown shriller and more hysterical in their denunciations; royal propaganda contributed to the :flood of billingsgate that poured forth from chanceries. People at first frightened by the accusations became inured to them.

Part of the reason for the violence of debate was the growing impossibility to distinguish, within the Church, between its spiritual offices and political functions. The appearance, in these times, of protest groups that adopt the name " spiritual " is indicative of the deeply troubled soul of Christian people. Church had become a word and concept that was overloaded with connotations of hierarchy, authority, power, sword, and rule. Thus, the words religious and spiritual became descriptive of groups opposed to an over-institutionalized Church.

The Papacy, since the 18th century, had been occupied by a succession of canon lawyers, diplomats and ecclesiastical bureaucrats. Their struggles with Hohenstaufens and Capetians blunted spiritual sensibilities.[18] But the attempted ' cure ' in 1294 of electing a saintly hermit proved disastrous to the administration of the Church. Then, with a violent wrench back, the cardinals chose Boniface VIII, whose election was a scandal. And then, on Boniface's death, when the need for a strong Pope was evident, the cardinals began to choose

[19] Cantor, *Medieval History*, p. 568.

[18] Whether politically astute or not, the advice of Pope Clement IV when asked for advice by Charles of Anjou about the fate of Conradin was hardly the answer of a Vicar of Christ. " *Vita Conradini, mors Caroli; vita Caroli, mor1 Conradini.*"

timid and easily-swayed prelates, like Benedict XI and Clement V.a

It was to Avignon that Eckhart was summoned near the end of his life; it is in Avignon that he may well have died. That city had been intended to be a refuge for the Bishop of Rome, safe from the tumults and violence of his own decayed see-city. But Avignon became a byword for loose living and corruption. A brilliant court gathered there where the vast and growing organization of the Church was concentrated. An extensive financial, judicial, and administrative bureaucracy was created, carrying on the work of an international corporation. Such a spirit led to a climate of secular interests and luxurious living. "It was not a life conducive to piety, nor to spiritual elevation, nor in many cases even to a decent morality." [15] Petrarch, admittedly a hostile witness, proclaimed the city to be "the home of all vices and all misery ... (where there) is no piety, no charity, no faith, no reverence, no fear of God, nothing holy, nothing just, nothing sacred." That Meister Eckhart was condemned by such a group of people would be, in the eyes of many, a fair claim to sanctity.

To be spiritual or holy now seemed to place one in conflict with the Church. Reform of the Church was proving more and more difficult even as its need was becoming more apparent. On the lips of many was the evangelical query: "If the salt loses its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matthew, 5: 18). The poverty and apostolic-life movements of the 11th century had led to the Gregorian reforms in the papacy. But now the papacy itself seemed to be the stumbling-block to reform. Reform movements in religious life had produced new monastic establishments like the Cistercians and finally the great and revolutionary establishment of the friars. But by the 14th century, the Franciscans and Dominicans had passed their zenith and were on the verge of decline. Everywhere the salt seemed to have lost its savor. For many, in the 14th century,

[14] Cantor, *Medieval History,* p. 569.

[10] Cheyney, *The Damm of a New Era,* p.

there was an ardent desire to find new identites, new communities.

Ronald Knox wrote that " the Middle Ages suffered from a growing nostalgia for the Sermon on the Mount." [15a] The call was for an evangelical simplicity and a life of poverty. This spiritual yearning contrasted strongly with the rising power of bankers, merchants, shopkeepers who were creating a money economy, a Europe of trade and commerce. But vast numbers of people detested this emphasis on money and greed.

In the year of Eckhart's birth, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino published his book, *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel.* He promised that ' spiritual ' men would soon rule the earth and establish here the kingdom of God. Gerard's book and many other writings of the period heaped scorn on those who deviated from the rule and spirit of Francis, the Poor Man.

The story and fate of the Spiritual Franciscans is well known. An equal concern was voiced in ecclesiastical circles over a similar contemporary phenomenon: the Beguines and the Beghards. And it was Eckhart's association with the Beguines that provided his enemies with the handle which would bring him down. It was Eckhart's work among these simple people that John XXII would stigmatize as "sowing errors and thorns." The impression one receives is that popes and curia fell victim to panic when confronted with the Beguinine movement.

Who were the Beguines and the Beghards? Caesar of Heisterbach, in 1230, makes the first mention of them. They are reported as an organized group around Liege. The name of a reforming priest, Lambert le Beges (died: 1177) is associated with the group. Some few scholars believe that the name is derived from this priest; it is rather more likely that the name was given to him because of his work with the group. A greater number of historians guess that the name " Beguine " is derived from *Albigensi,* corrupted to *Bigensi* and thence to *Beguini.* Hence the name points to an heretical orientation.

[15a] Knox, Ronald, *Enthusiasm, A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: University Press, 1961), p. 104.

That theory is superficially tempting, but I think it confuses a later development of some Beguines into heresy with the original purpose.

When first encountered, the Beguines were groups of pious women, with no heretical intentions; rather they had passionate desire for the most intense forms of religious experience. They were, for the most part, unmarried women, with some widows. Unmarried women had no status in medieval society and enjoyed no social esteem. The Beguine movement spread rapidly in Belgium, northern France, the Rhine valley, Bavaria, and Central Germany. Many of the women adopted a form of religious dress and lived in unofficial convents. They had vernacular translations of the Bible and discussed the Scriptures among themselves. A Franciscan of Tornai complained that, though they were untrained in theology, they delighted in new and over-subtle ideas. A German bishop characterized them as " idle, gossiping women who refuse obedience to men under the pretext that God is best served in freedom." [16]

The demands of the Beguines for spiritual direction vividly exposes the greatest weakness of the medieval church: the ignorance of the clergy. Few priests were able to give religious counsel, direction, and formation. The friars, especially the Dominicans, did undertake some work among the Beguines, but they never succeeded in touching the whole movement. There was so much to do that work among these ' gossiping' women seems to have had a very low priority.

Fear, fed by rumor, led bishop after bishop to condemn the Beguines. A synod of Mainz in 1259 condemned them all and this judgment was repeated in 1310. In the Rhine valley, where Eckhart worked, friars were forbidden to speak to a Beguine except in church or in the presence of witnesses. Pope John XXII, in 1810, issued a blanket condemnation of the movement, unleashing a persecution that did not discriminate between orthodox and heretical members.

[18] For background of Beguines and Beghards, cf. Norman Cohn, *Tke Pursuit of the Millenium,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 148-162 and Rufus Jones, The *Fl<JWering of Mysticism* (New York: Hafner, 1971), pp. 48-60.

The Beghards, a sort of male counterpart to the Beguines, began to flourish around 1230. Arising out of the twelfth century poverty movement, they formed, at first, an unofficial lay counterpart to the mendicant orders. But though the friars were a great influence at the beginning, a large number of Beghards-and perhaps the greater number-gradually became anti-clerical and anti-mendicant. One observer described them as being " full of contempt for the easy-going monks and friars .•. impatient of ecclesiastical disicpline." [17]

Some of the Beghards fell under the influence of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, a group active along the Rhine as early as 1215. They held for a kind of pantheistic mysticism. A council of bishops in Cologne, in 1307, condemned Beguines and Beghards " who were teaching the doctrine of the Free Spirit." The Council of Vienne examined their doctrines; the Bull *Ad nostrum* condemned their beliefs as heretical. In 1317, the bishop of Strasbourg, where Eckhart was teaching theology, set up a commission of inquiry and issued severe laws against the Free Spirits.

As might be expected, in such times of turmoil, millenarianism also appeared. In the Rhine valley there was an apparently unbroken tradition of revolutionary millenarianism continuing down to the 16th century. [18] This was an area of serious overpopulation, involved in a process of rapid economic and social change. In such conditions, the urban proletariat suffered not only poverty but also " disorientation." Migrations to the town had destroyed a whole network of social relationships. Living in a state of chronic frustration, many of these urban poor found in the forgotten millenial ideals of early Christianity a social myth that explained their present distress but also promised prompt and effective indemnification.

Among the rural poor as well, radical ideas found lodgement. A decade before Eckhart's birth, the "Shepherds' movement" swept across France in a fury of radical anti-clericalism. The

"Cohn, *Pursuit of Millenium,* p. 159.

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 58.

later part of the 14th century would witness the bloody Jacquerie rebellion in France and the Peasants' Rebellion in England.

The unsettled nature of the period is often given as the reason for all this violence. But more specifically, the forms it took have a relationship to our theme of the search for new identity and community. For though the Church was in decline, religion remained a universal concern. Leaders of popular revolts appeared as self-anointed prophets and saints, as the recipients of heavenly revelations, as messengers from God or from the Virgin Mary. They focussed the discontent of the people and led them in the only expression of dissatisfaction available: insurrection.

Boniface VIII, reading reports from all over Christendom about the growth of millenarist ideas, impatiently asked: " Why do the simple folk expect the end of the world? " There is no record of an answer, but the august Pontiff might have been told that most of the simple folk were sure that the end of the world, at its worst, could be no more terrifying than the travails of the world they now lived in.[19]

Along with millenarism, there also grew a belief in witches. Witchcraft grew in magnitude throughout the fourteenth century. Along with the economic and social crises, along with the political and cultural dislocations, there was a deliberate encouragement, by many Church leaders, of belief in witchcraft. " The terrors of the 14th century made the image of the witch more vivid than ever before." Belief in witches became a settled, constant, and common opinion of mankind as the *communis opinio* of theologians.[20]

The answer for many to the dilemmas, contradictions, and brutalities of the fourteenth century was mysticism. The significance and reality of this mystical movement is beyond doubt. But interpretations of it differ widely. Daniel-Rops

[19] Christopher Lasch, "The Narcissist Society," *New YMk Review of Books,* 28, no. 15 (September 80, 1976), p. *5.*

[20] Jeffrey B. Russell, *Witchcraft m the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 170.

says that it was different after 1800; gone was" the equilibrum between the contemplative and active life ... between mystical knowledge and speculative theology. Henceforward, mysticism tended to become sufficient unto itself, to shut itself away in the cloister, to be its own end." [21] Karl Voss wrote that 14th century mysticism "may be characterized as the dreamy inclination towards the supernatural," something that enjoyed a greater popularity in that time than " the sober spirit of Thomism." [22] Edward Cheyney described the mystic movements of that century as containing a " bitter condemnation of existing religion... (promising) a new era when men would live in continuous ecstasy." [23] Friedrich Heer believes that mysticism was an attempt, in those troubled times, " at building up inner kingdoms of the mind and soul whilst outside the people of Europe remained locked in a state of permanent civil war." [24]

Meister Eckhart was at the center of this mystical revolution. He was its greatest figure. Understanding his age-its terrors and tumults and hopes-is a key to the appreciation of his legacy, admiration of his achievements and respect for his courage. Others more qualified will open for us the profundities of his thought; historians must defer to theologians in that regard. Historians see him as a unique figure against the tapestry of his times.

More and more, historians have come to recognize his greatness. Karl Bihlmeyer called him " a most loving and loyal son of the Church... (with) the pecular gift of being able to present the deepest truths of religion with force and feeling, yet in a pure and simple language." [25] Kurt Reinhardt called him " the most ingenious of the German mystics," with an influence not only on later Catholic and Protestant mysticism

[11] Daniel-Rops, *Cathedral, and Crusade,* p. 595.

[••]Karl Vossler, *Medieval, Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times.* (New York: Ungar, 1958), I, p. 306.

[••]Cheyney, *The Dawn of a New Era,* p. flOfl.

[••]Heer, *The Medieval, World,* p. fl6.

[15] Karl Bihlmcyer & Hermann Tiichle, *Church History* (Westminster: Newman, 1963), II, p. 4flf.

but on the course of German Romanticism and Idealism.[26] R. W. Southern hails him as the prophet of the individual in religion. " He opened the door to many different destinations. The people whom he roused could never again be kept in order, the thoughts he suggested could never be suppressed, and Europe could never be the same again." [27]

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••Kurt Reinhardt, *Germany 2000 Years* (New Ungar, 1971), l, p.

[21] R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. !!6.

FUNDAMENTAL THEMES IN MEISTER ECKHART'S MYSTICISM

INTRODUCTION

THERE ARE in Meister Eckhart' s writings two great motifs which animate his thought. The first, a Neoplatonic theme, is that of the unity and simplicity of pure being. For Eckhart, the highest name one can give to God is to call Him a nameless One, a unity in which all the divine attributes interfuse. To call God the One is to admit our inability to name God. It is to recognize that all God's attributes are identical with God Himself and identical with one another. What God truly is recedes behind the attributes we give Him in some mysterious dark night of unity which Eckhart likes to call a divine " wasteland " or the " Godhead." God is the *negatio negationis* (LW, I, 175),[1] that is, *not* what-

[1] All references to Eckhart's German works will be to *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate,* hrsg. u. iibers. v. Josef Quint (Miinchen: Hanser Verlag, 1968); hereafter " Q ". The page references will be followed by the lines, then a slash followed by the pagination of the English translation, where this is available. The English translations we will cite will be referred to as follows. " Bl. " : *MeUter Eckhart,* A Modern Translation by Robert Blakney (New York: Harper and Row, 1941). "CS": *MeUter Eckhart: Sel,ected Treatises and Sermons,* trans. J. M. Clark and J. V. Skinner (London: Faber and Faber, 1958). "Cl.": *Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of His Works with an Anthology of His Sermon8,* selected and trans. J. M. Clark (London: Nelson and Nelson, 1957). Other abbreviations of Eckhart's works to be employed are as follows. DW: Meister Eckhart, *Die Deutsche Werke,* Hrsg. im Auftrage der deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft hrsg. J. Quint, 5 Bande (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986 ff.) LW: Meister Eckhart, *Die Lateinische Werke, 5* Biinde, Hrsg. im Auftrage der deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, hrsg. E. Benz et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986 ff.) The best overall introduction to Eckhart's work is Quint's splendid " *Einleitung"* in Q, 9-50. The best study of the Latin works is Vladimir Lossky, *Theologie negative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maitre Eckhart* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960). For a comparison of the thought of Meister Eckhart with that of Martin Heidegger, see my *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978) .

ever we say He is. He is pure, simple, naked, divested of every attribute the human mind can frame. And if the soul would unite with God, the soul too must become naked and pure and simple, divested of all "properties," free of all creatures.

The second theme is that of life and birth, of emergence and pouring forth, of life being passed on to life. Instead of the stillness of the Godhead, Eckhart speaks of a divine process; instead of the barren wasteland, giving birth; instead of a nameless substance, the relation of Father and Son. Of course this theme too is Neoplatonic, insofar as the doctrine of "emanation" from the One is Neoplatonic. But Eckhart has baptized emanationism and rethought it around the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, Creation, the Incarnation and Redemption. The Trinity is the divine life of the Father giving birth to the Son and the two together to the Holy Spirit. This is a process of life welling up within God Himself and then spilling over into creation and into the Son of God made man in Christ. Finally this life flows into all men in the life of grace, wherein the just man is justified by being born again as that same Son of the Father. It is in this context that Eckhart developed his most characteristic and well known teaching, the birth of the Son in the soul of the just man.

As a springboard for discussing Eckhart's thought I wish to take as a guide one sermon in particular, *"Beati pauperes s'j)iritu,"* "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This particular sermon has all the characteristics of Eckhart' s authentic style. It is a paradoxical, daring and, at first hearing, even an outrageous sermon. It was this sermon among others that William of Ockham had in mind when he complained to the Inquisitors that it was not with his theories but with those of a German Dominican master, who utters the most absurd things, that they should be concerned.[2] Over five hundred years later Hegel would quote a text from this sermon (in a somewhat corrupted form) which seemed to him (wrongly) to anticipate

[2] For William of Ockham's comments on Eckhart see Alois Dempf, *Meister Eckhart* (Miinchen: Kosel Verlag KG, 1960), pp. 20-fll, 108.

his own Idealism.[3] The sermon itself is a daring account of the unity of the soul with God. It preaches a unity with God that is so perfect that one appears obliged, as one author puts it, to jump out of one's shadow to achieve it.[4] The sermon focuses on the unity of the soul with the Godhead, a unity which is expressed in the gnostic saying with which Eckhart concludes his treatise" The Nobleman": "one with the One, one from the One, one in the One and in the One one eternally. Amen." (Q, 149: 159) This sermon develops the first of the two themes we mentioned above rather than the second. For the" poor in spirit" according to Eckhart are the souls which have divested themselves of all relationships with creatures, the naked, detached souls. We must thus go outside this sermon to introduce the theme of the birth of the Son in the soul. In so doing we will have occasion to discuss how these two different themes, one Neoplatonic and the other Scriptural, work together in the unity of one coherent teaching on the spiritual life.

Detachment and Letting Be

" Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 1: 3). Meister Eckhart's point of departure in this sermon, as in all his sermons, is a scriptural text, but his interpretation of the passage is, as he says, " parabolical " or" mystical" (Thery, 170/BI., Eckhart does not deny the value of a straightforward, literal interpretation of the sacred writings, but he always searches for a deeper sense. That is why Eckhart begins this sermon by distinguishing two kinds of poverty. The first is external or literal poverty; the second is inner or spiritual poverty. And while the first is

[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *Siimtliche Werke. Vorlesungein iiber die Philot1ophie der Religion I* (Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1959), p. 228. On Meister Eckhart and German Idealism see E. Benz, *Lell sources mystiques de la philosophie romantique allemande* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1968).

•*Meister Eckhart, Ausgewiihlte Predigtein und Traktate von der Geburt dl!JT' Seele,* iibers. u. eingel. v. Emil Pohl (Giitersloh: Bertelsmann, 1959), p. 84.

praiseworthy, it is not the concern of this sermon. The first is practiced by those who obey the laws of God. But Meister Eckhart's sights are set on a higher goal-on a sublime unity with God which is not merely a matter of keeping God's commandments, but of a self-purification in which every hint of the ego is extinguished. What then is spiritual poverty? What is a "poor" man understood in the radical, mystical sense? Eckhart answers, a poor man is "he who *wills* nothing and *knows* nothing and *has* nothing" (Q. 303: 26-7/Bl., 227). It is around these three points that the sermon is arranged.

The poor man is to begin with one who wills nothing. That is on the face of it surely incorrect. For what of all those people who undertake the most strenuous acts of self-sacrifice, of giving alms to the poor, for example? The difficulty with such people is that they do not live in the same sphere in which Eckhart's discourse takes place. They live on the level of "works," of doing this or that, of everyday activities. Expressed in the terms of scholastic metaphysics, Eckhart would say that their lives are totally spent on the level of the "faculties" of the soul, and that they are unmindful of the soul's "essence" or what he calls in German its *"Grund"* or ground. On the level of the faculties, there are those who perform bad works-e. g., they steal or cheat-and there are those who perform good works-they are honest and give alms. The latter have good intentions and God will reward them with the kingdom of heaven. But the sphere in which Eckhart discourses is *beyond* their good and evil. It is deeper than good works. It has to do with the ground and source and deeper essence of all good works. That is why many people will not understand this sermon, and Eckhart's advice to them is simply not to trouble themselves about it, for it is not necessary to know this (Q, 309: 8-9/Bl., 232).

What then does it mean to will nothing?

So long as a man retains his *will* to will to fulfill the most dear will of God, such a man does not have the poverty of which I speak. For this man still has a will with which he would satisfy the will of God, and that is *not* true poverty. (Q, 304: /Bl.,

To be truly poor is to will nothing, and to will nothing means just that. It means not to will even the highest things, even the most dear will of God. To surpass even the will of God d,oes not of course imply that we may do things against the will of God, but it means that we must not will at all. Eckhart is summoning his hearers to make a leap altogether beyond the sphere of willing, beyond willing good things or bad things, to the realm of non-willing, of will-lessness. The soul may not will the eternal happiness which is promised by the scriptures to the poor in spirit. It may not will to do God's will. Ultimately it must let go of God Himself. That is indeed what St. Paul did when he said that for sake of Christ he would be separated from Christ:

The highest and most extreme thing which a man can let go of is that he let go of God for the sake of God. Now St. Paul let go of God for God's sake. He let go of everything he could take from God, and everything which God could give him and everything which he could receive from God. (Q, 214: 34-215: 2/Cl., 225).

Non-willing is a letting go not only of created goods but even of God Himself.

But this letting go is also a letting be, i. e., it is letting God be God:

Now God desires nothing more of you than that you go out of yourself according to your creaturely mode of being and let God be God in you. (Q, 180: 32-4/Bl., 127).

To be poor in spirit is to completely strip ourselves, to " divest " ourselves of our personal goals and desires, to empty out every vestige of self-love and self-will, not in order to replace them with higher goals and desires, but rather in order to " let " something else-the impulse of God's own life within us-take over. In that way the words of St. Paul will be literally fulfilled in us: I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me. Such " letting be " Eckhart calls in German " *Gelassenheit,"* from the verb *lassen* (to leave, to let go, to let be). The poor man thus makes himself empty in order to make the way clear for

one greater than himself. Now the *slightest* thing will prevent God's entry. For God is so simple and refined that even the smallest created speck in the soul would His advent into the soul. We cannot receive God partly, because God is absolutely simple. We must receive the whole God if we are to receive God at all, and that can be accomplished only if we are ourselves wholly pure and simple. The soul is the temple and the money changers in the temple are those who seek God for profit. Some men love God, Eckhart says, the way they love their cow: for its milk (Q, 227: 26-9/Cl., 147). They do not love God but God's gifts. Now if Jesus is to enter the temple, if He is to unite with the soul, then the soul must make a clearing for Him. It must be poor, empty, selfless and unattached to its own interests, he they temporal or eternal. Only then is the soul a fit place for God's coming, a proper temple.

The purity and poverty with which the soul must live if it is to achieve unity with God is also expressed by Eckhart in the word *"Abgeschiedenheit,"* which is translated as "detachment." Eckhart wrote a short treatise by this name which admirably expresses the sense this notion has for him (DW, V, *539* ff./ CS, 160 ff.). The detached soul is that which does not mix with anything created, which keeps itself pure of created things and even of God as a good for it. To be detached is to be pure and empty:

> It is right that you should know that to be empty of all creatures is to be full of God, and to be full of all creatures is to be empty of God.
>
> And therefore if a man is to become like God as far as a creature can possess similarity to God, it must be by means of detachment. (DW, V, 164).

Thus *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit* are equivalent notions, and they both refer to the *pauperes spiritu* of the sermon we have taken as our guide.

The second part of Eckhart's definition of the poor in spirit is that the poor man is one who *knows* nothing:

He who is to be poor in spirit must be poor of all his own knowledge, so that he does not know anything, neither God nor creatures nor himself. (Q, 306: £3-6/Bl., £30).

Once again this demand too seems grossly in error. For why else did God give man a mind except that he should acquire knowledge? What possible merit is there in this "unknowledge" *(Unwissen:* Q, 430: 12/Bl., 107)? In another sermon, Eckhart responds that as man is subordinated to God so hur.nan action is subordinated to divine action. The condition of divine action is human passivity; the condition that God act in man is that man submit himself to and open himself up for God's action. There is thus no defect in this passivity. For anything that the soul could learn by its own cognition is nothing in comparison to what it could learn from God if God were to speak to the soul. But God can speak in the soul only if the soul is silent. The soul can learn divine wisdom only by extinguishing its own human wisdom. The highest wisdom for the soul is to strip itself of its own concepts and its own images and its own ideas-to become ignorant-in order that the knowledge of God may be expressed in it. It was from texts such as these that Nicholas of Cusa would develop his idea of the *docta ignorantia,* the learned ignorance, the unknowing which knows best of all.[5]

Mary and Martha: Vita Activa et Contemplativa

One can at this point very reasonably raise the question as to whether Eckhart has not fallen into quietism. For it is presumably of the essence of quietism to say that the highest state the soul can achieve is to do nothing and to know nothing and to let God do everything to it and in it. And since every kind of activity involves some faculty of the soul, then Eckhart would presumably counsel the soul to cease all

• Nicholas of Cusa developed two of his principal ideas from Meister Eckhart, the *coincidentia oppositorum* and the *docta ignorantia;* see Dempf, pp. 108, 117 ff. See also H. Wackerzapp, *Der Einftuss Meister Eckharts auf die sophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues* (Miinster: Aschendorfl', 1962).

activity. But nothing could be further from the truth. To see how this is so let us examine Eckhart's views on the relationship between the contemplative and the active life. The 13th century masters who argued for the superiority of the contemplative life pointed to the Gospel story of Mary and Martha. They pointed out that it was Mary, who chose to sit contemplatively at the feet of Jesus and savor his holiness, who Jesus said had chosen "the better part." Martha, who was doing all the serving, Jesus chided, saying "Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one" (Luke, 10: 38-42).

But Eckhart preached a sermon on this Gospel story which, in his audacious-but parabolical-way, inverted its traditional significance ("*lntravit Jesus in quoddam castellum."* Q, 280 ff.) Martha wanted Jesus to have Mary help her with the work. She did this, according to Eckhart, not out of spite, but because she loved Mary and wished to make her more perfect. For to Eckhart, Mary symbolized the *merely* contemplative life, a sheltered life of prayers, visions and consolations, devoid of concrete works. She represented the spiritual equivalent of what Hegel called in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the "beautiful soul," the spirit which had not been exposed to the power of negativity.[6] Martha on the other hand is a spiritually more mature personality, ripened and "exercised" by the years. Martha is not the opposite of Mary, viz., action without contemplation, but the perfection towards which Mary should strive, viz., a life of action that flows out of contemplation. Martha could work and in the midst of activity preserve her inner silence and unity with God. Mary's union with God, on the other hand, was so fragile and untested that she had to rest at Jesus's feet in order to preserve it. That is why Jesus repeated Martha's name

[6] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind,* trans. J. Baillie (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 664 ff., 675 f., 795. For an excellent account of Eckhart on the active life and of the Mary and Martha story see Q's "*Einleitung,"* pp. 87-48. See also Shizutcru Ueda, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit* (Giitersloh: G. Mohn, 1965), p. 187-9.

twice: "Martha, Martha." This signifies that Martha possessed unity with God in the ground of her soul, because she loved God and not creatures. But her love of God is not at all *hindered* by creatures. She is able to be both active and inwardly still.

Eckhart is here preaching a somewhat unmonastic, Protestant ideal which was immortalized in Kierkegaard's words in *Fear and Trembling* that if we ever met the knight of faith we would not recognize him, for he would look like a tax collector.[7] Eckhart held that inner silence is entirely compatible with other activity. Indeed we need look no further than his own life for an example of this unique compatibility. He offered a good illustration of what he meant: a wheel moving on its own axis is fully in motion even while its center is still. Eckhart's point of departure for developing this position seems to have been Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas taught that the contemplative life was higher in itself than the active life but that, on earth, where we do not fully possess God but continually strive to posssess Him, it is not the active life but the mixed life which is best (S. T., II-II, 182).[8] The mixed life is the life of action which springs from contemplation. The ideal for Eckhart and Aquinas is neither pure vision nor sheer activism, but an active life which springs from deeper sources. And that clearly has nothing to do with quietism.

The Ground of the Soul

We have made frequent reference in these pages to Eckhart's notion of the " ground of the soul." Before we return to our commentary on Sermon 32 (" *Beati Pauperes* ") we must pause to better clarify this idea, for it lies at the heart of Eckhart's teachings. It is useful, I think, in explaining this

[7] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* trans. W. Lowrie (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 49. Dempf discusses Meister Eckhart's relation to the Reformation in pp. 55-67.

[8] All references to Thomas Aquinas will be to his *Summa Theologiae,* hereafter "S. T." Translations are from *The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas,* ed. A. Pegis, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1954).

notion to go back to the scholastic and particularly the Thomistic distinction between the substance of the soul and its faculties. The soul in its substance does not " do " anything, for what it does it does by its faculties. The substance is the being or essence of the soul, what it "is," not what it does (Q, *57*/CS, 66-7). From this substance issue certain kinds of faculties. It is because the soul of man is intellectual that an intellect and free will spring from it, thus enabling the soul to carry out its natural destiny to know and to love. It is not the case, St. Thomas says, that all souls are the same and that they are differentiated only by their faculties. One could not find an intellectual power perfecting a merely sentient soul (S. T., I-II, 110, 4, ad 3m) . It is because the soul of man in its *being* is intellectual that man has an intellectual *faculty* (S. T., I-II, 110, 4, ad 4m) .

These considerations appear to have been very important to Eckhart and he made use of them as a point of departure for developing his own mystical speculation about the" ground " of the soul. For Eckhart saw in this distinction a deeper mystical significance which, as far as I know, is not to be found in Aquinas. He saw the substance of the soul as a hidden chamber, a little castle, a little spark, a silent wasteland, in which an event could take place which is impossible for the faculties. In Aquinas the substance of the soul is an incomplete being which must needs be perfected by its faculties if it is to carry out its natural functions. Hence, Thomas says the soul is related to its faculties as potency is to act. But Eckhart sees it as a citadel which has been especially reserved by God for a higher life than is permitted the faculties. The fate of the faculties is to be destined for commerce with creatures. They can operate only in conjunction with the body and the senses and hence they are bound always to begin with the sensible world. The lower faculties of the sensible order and the higher faculties of the intellectual order thus always have to do with " this or that," with this creature or that creature. The only shelter from creatures and from activities which are oriented towards creatures is to be found in the hidden chamber

into which neither thoughts nor desires nor sensible affections can in principle gain entry. Indeed so hidden is this inner ground of the soul that the individual himself does not know it directly, St. Thomas said, but only by a reflection on its own acts (S. T., I, 87). For Eckhart this means that the man who spends all the energies of his soul on his " works," be they good or bad, will never have any intimation at all of this hidden inner sphere. The only way back to this inner ground is the way of detachment and letting be, the way which lets knowledge go for a silent unknowing, which lets willing go for motionless rest.

How does Eckhart characterize this inner ground of the soul (cf. Q, 161: 19 ff./Cl., 135 ff.)? Because it is withdrawn from the senses, it is, he says, untouched by the body and time, anything corporeal, by any "before " and "after." It is alone "free " because it is wholly untrammelled *(ledig)* by anything created. The highest thing one could say about the ground of the soul is that it is free of all names and of all forms. There is nothing we can say of it, for whatever we say will more properly apply to something in the outer world or in the world of activities. The elusiveness and unnameability of the ground of the soul is, like God's, rooted in its simplicity and purity of being. Thus the ground of the soul is very much like God himself; Eckhart depicts them in the same way. Nothing is so like God as the ground of the soul; nothing is so like the ground of the soul as God. They have an exclusive reciprocity with one another. Only God is pure and simple and free enough to enter the ground of the soul and only the soul is pure and simple and free enough to receive God. There is thus a mutual kinship between them: " Where God is, there is the soul; where the soul is, there is God." (Q, 207: 1-2/Cl., 203)

Eckhart often calls this hidden ground of the soul " reason" *(Vernimft)* . This is misleading unless we recall St. Thomas's distinction between the rational faculty and the rational soul. It is because the soul is rational in its *being* that it is equipped with a rational faculty. Now when Eckhart speaks of the ground of the soul as reason he is referring to the rational

being of the soul, that is, its spirituality and immaterialty, which is the root and *ratw* of its intellectual powers. God is reason *(Vernunft, intellectus)* and the soul is a little spark of divine reason (Q, 197: *25* ££./Cl., 207 ff.), that is, a created likeness of the divine nature. All things are like God insofar as they are his creatures, but the soul alone is made in the " image " of God insofar as it alone is, like God, intellectual (Q, 425: 17-9/Bl., 103). The rational soul is a natural dynamism towards and capacity for God, a " seed of God " (Thery, 166-71/Bl., 275). It is of the same kind as God-intellectual being. Indeed if the soul were only and wholly intellectual, then it would be itself uncreated. In a remark which drew down upon him the wrath of the Inquisitors he says:

Were man wholly of such a kind, he would be completely uncreated and uncreatable. (Q, 215: 14-5/Cl., i25)

What Eckhart means is orthodox. In God *intelligere* and *esse* are the same and God is *esse* because he is *intelligere,* and not conversely. God thus is pure intellectuality. That is why it is said, " In the beginning was the *logos."* [9] The soul on the other hand is in its very being a created participation in the divine intellectuality, an *intelligere* which is not identical with its *esse.* But if it were, like God, pure intellectuality then it would be no creature at all but God Himself. The statement is " emphatic " and means to show the kinship between the soul's nature and God. Indeed Eckhart has radicalized the traditional defense by the Dominican order of the primacy of the intellect over the will by identifying the essence of the soul and the essence of God as intellectual being and making of the intellect the place of the mystical union.

[9] For Eckhart's arguments on the primacy of *intelligere* over in God see his first *Parisian Question* in LW, V, pp. 40 ff., the English translation in *Master Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologues,* trans. with an introduction by A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1974), pp. 45 ff., and my " The Nothingness of the Intellect in Meister Eckhart's *Parisian Questions," The Thomist* XXXIX, I (January, 1975), 89-92. See also Dom Placid Kelly, "Meister Eckhart's Doctrine of the Divine Subjectivity," *The Downside Review* 76 (1958), 65-IOS.

But what is the connection between " reason " and the " nakedness " or emptiness in terms 0£ which Eckhart has up to now spoken 0£ the ground 0£ the soul? The answer is to be found, surprisingly enough, in Aristotle, who spoke 0£ the intellectual soul as a *tabida rasa,* and who said that the soul must be like the pupil 0£ the eye which lacks all color in order to perceive the colors 0£ its objects. So the intellect must be devoid of every nature or being if it is to be able to know them. l£ the soul is in a way all things, this is possible only if it *is not* any one of them in fact, but a capacity to " become " them or to receive their forms, 0£ which however it is 0£ itself devoid *(De anima,* Bk. III, c. 4) . Thus in a remarkable disputed question held at Paris in 1301 Eckhart defended the " nothingness of the intellect." [10] Thus to say that the ground of the soul is "nameless," that it is "pure and simple," that it is " divested of every this or that," that it is a " nothingness," or tha.t it is " reason "-all of this amounts to saying the same thing.

The whole doctrine of the ground of the soul is aptly summarized in Eckhart's statement that:

.... this light has more unity with God than it has unity with any power of the soul, with which it nonetheless stands in the unity of being. (Q, 315:

The inner citadel of the soul is so pure and detached from creatures, it is so utterly unlike them and like God, that it actually stands more closely related to God than it does to its own intellectual and volitional faculties, even though these faculties flow directly from it. That is why Eckhart can say with St. Augustine that God is closer to the soul than it is to itself (Q, 201: 15-7/Cl., 198).

God and Godhead

Let us now resume our commentary on Eckhart's sermon *"Beau pauperes.',* We have seen up to now that true (mys-

[10] See n. *9.*

tical) poverty consists in willing nothing and knowing nothing. Now we recall that there is a third requirement for true poverty: *having* nothing. At this point, Eckhart's sermon swings into its most paradoxical phase. His words become dark and audacious and we are forced to come to grips with what seems to me the very heart of his mystical speculation.

Everything that has been said up to now in the sermon must be overcome or radicalized in an even deeper understanding of spiritual poverty. In Eckhart's interpretation of the Gospel story of Christ driving the money changers out of the temple, we were led to think that the soul's highest duty is to prepare a pure and empty *dwelling pla.ce* for the advent of God into the soul. True poverty meant making oneself a fit temple for God's presence. But this is not high enough:

> So long as this is still in man, man is still not poor with the most authentic poverty. For God does not in all his works intend that man should have a place within himself in which God could work. Rather, this alone is poverty of spirit, that a man should be so divested of God and of all His (God's) works, that God, insofar as He wishes to work in the soul, should Himself be even the very place in which He wishes to work, which is something He would gladly do. (Q, 307: 16-21/Bl., 230)

> Man must become so pure and simple and divested of himself that he cannot so much as be even an empty vessel into which God pours Himself. God and the soul are not to be conceived of as separate realities, as if God were " there " and the soul were "here" (Q, 186: 30-1/Cl., 189-90), for God and the soul are one. Thus the difficulty which affects everything that has been said so far in the sermon is that it presupposes a distinction between God and the soul:

> Where man still reserves a place in himself, there he is still retaining a distinction. Consequently, I ask God that he may rid me of God. For my essential being is beyond God insofar as we grasp God as the beginning of creatures. (Q, 308: 4-8/Bl., 231)

To unite with God we must overcome the distinction between God and the soul. But to overcome this distinction we must

be rid of God. Here Ec]:chart's mystical speculation reaches its climax. Eckhart proposes a kind of mystical atheism in which God Himself will disappear, in which we will be rid of God.

We must however understand him rightly and not, like his Franciscan inquisitors, assume the worst. In fact, Eckhart is opening up for us a distinction between "God" *(deus, Gott)* and the "Godhead" *(deitas, Gottheit)*.[11] By "God" he means the divine being insofar as it can be named and known by our mind. Thus the faculty of the intellect grasps God as the "true," and the faculty of the will grasps God as the "good." Indeed "God" can be named with *every* name which signifies a true perfection-beautiful, just, merciful, etc. (cf. Thery, 169, n. 6./Bl., For God is all-perfect. God is the *nomen omninominabile,*[12] the name which every true attribute names. In the text we cited above Eckhart says that God is the beginning of creatures. That means that "God" is the name we use to signify the relationship of God to the world, of which He is the creator. "God" names God as He is related to creatures.

Now the "Godhead," on the other hand, signifies God as He is in Himself, apart from any name we give to Him and apart from His relation to creatures. The Godhead signifies the hidden being of God which recedes behind every name, the *nomen innominabile,* the name which cannot be named. It refers to God prior to His being named or known, prior to any "properties" *(Eigenschaften)* or what the scholastics would call "attributes." The Godhead is therefore a parallel notion to the ground of the soul. For the Godhead is God's ground, God's hidden being.

With every name that is predicated of God a certain multiplicity is introduced into the divine being, even if as an *ens ration'is.* God appears to have an infinity of predicates, whereas the divine being in itself, apart from our names, is absolutely

[11] On the distinction between *Gottheit* and *Gott* see Ueda, 118-9.

[12] For a detailed study of the "*nomen omninominabile*" and the "*nomen innominabile,*" see Lossky, chs. I and

one and simple. The *nomen omninominabile* is the thought God, God as He has been subjected to the categories of human thought. But God in Himself is one. Eckhart's extreme emphasis on the divine unity is clearly Neoplatonic in origin, although all the great masters of the Middle Ages taught the doctrine of the unity of the divine being. The Christian masters, unlike Maimonides and the Jewish theologians, however, had brought the doctrine of the divine unity into reconcilation with the Christian dogma of the Trinity. But one of the most astonishing features of Eckhart's thought is that the Godhead is said by him to lie deeper than the divine Trinity.[13] The "trinity" of persons is subordinate to the "unity" of being or nature. Now the standard teaching of Aquinas and the other Christian masters had been that the unity of God's being was a rational or philosophical attribute of God which could be known by all men, whether Christian or Jew or Moslem. But the trinity of persons is a revealed truth which uncovers the hidden workings of the divine life and is accessible only to those with the light of the Christian faith. "Unity " is overt, but the Trinity is hidden. Eckhart, however, takes the opposite position. The trinity of persons is a multiplicity whereas God's inner being is a unity. The Trinity names God's properties, His power (the Father), wisdom (the Son) and love (the Holy Spirit), whereas the true God is unnameable. Thus Eckhart writes:

> Rather, just as he is a simple One, without every mode and property, so He is in this sense neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit, and yet He is something which is neither this nor that. (Q, 164: 15-7/Cl., 188)

The Trinity is a set of knowable properties. The divine unity is a mysterious recess.

We are now able to better understand the nature of the mystical union in Eckhart's teaching. There is a parallelism between

[13] On Eckhart and Maimonides see Josef Koch, " Meister Eckhart und die judische Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters," *Jahresber. der Schles. Gesellschaft fiir vaterl. Kultur* . Sonderausdruck.

the soul and God. In the soul we distinguish its faculties from its substance, and we hold that in its ground the soul is simple, timeless and pure of all contact with creatures. So too in God we distinguish " God " insofar as He is named and has properties and stands in relation with the created world, from the " Godhead " which is the ground of God. In His ground God too has nothing to do with creatures; He too is absolutely one and simple. The ground of the soul and the ground of God are naturally akin and their unity is complete:

> Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground. (Q. 180: *5-6/BI.,* 126).

Here both God and the soul are withdrawn from creatures. The soul which has nothing to do with this or that reunites itself with God in His being prior to creating the world. The soul is no longer creature; God is no longer creator. We have to do not with "God" and the "soul "-for these are creator and creature-but with the ground of God (the Godhead) and the ground of the soul. And these are not " two " which must be " united," but rather nameless and numberless " ones" which are one with each other, so that it falsifies them to speak of their having to be" united" with" one another." They are a nameless, naked unity.

It is now clear in what the third and most extreme definition of the poor in spirit consists. For every definition of poverty up to now has had to do with the " distinction " between " God " and the " soul," and has supposed them to be different things which need to be "united." But that notion is superseded by the nameless unity of the Godhead and the ground of the soul. The truly poor in spirit is not only unknowing and will-less but it" has" nothing in the radical sense of having divested itself of its own "actuality" or "reality" *(Wirklichkeit)* as a creature, i.e., a product of God's creative work *(Wirken).* It has divested itself not only of intellect and will but of its character as something created. And the astonishing thing is that even God is in a sense poor in spirit too, for He also has undergone a self-divesting in which He strips Himself of His properties as creator:

In all truth and as truly as God lives: God Himself will never look into it [=the ground of the soul] and never has looked into it insofar as He exists in the mode and "property" of His Persons... If God should ever look into it, it would cost Him all His divine names and His personal porperty. He must leave these out altogether if He wishes to look in. (Q, 164: 8-15/Cl., 138).

The poor in spirit-that is both God and the soul-are alone truly one. The union does not take place "in the soul," but in God. "God is one who acts *in Himself*" (Q, 807: 25-6/Bl., 281). And it takes place so in God that it is found only in the primal unity of the Godhead prior to the emergence of any distinction between God and the world.

Exitus and Reditus: Flowing Out and Breaking Through

When the soul attains the highest poverty of all, unity with the Godhead, it has in fact made its way back to the primal seat and origin of all things, an origin so original indeed that it cannot "yet" be called a cause or creator. In this origin the soul "first" lived:

In that being of God, namely, where God is beyond all being and beyond all distinction, there I was myself and there I willed myself and knew myself to create this man. (Q, 308: 8-11/Bl.,

Here Eckhart's love of paradox reaches its peak, and he appears (superficially to be sure) to fly in the face of the scholastic dictum which St. Thomas used repeatedly in his proofs for God's existence, that nothing is the cause of itself, nothing can precede its own being. He is, of course, referring to the Christian version of Plato's doctrine of the soul's preexistence. Before God was "God," before He created the world, the soul lay hidden as a seed, an idea in the dark night of the Godhead. There it "slept" eternally in His "concealed knowledge" (Q, 258: 17-9/Cl., 214). When the soul unites with the divine Godhead it returns to its own womb. The soul thus manages as it were to jump out of its own shadow, to become its own cause:

And consequently I am the cause of myself according to my being which is *eternal,* but not according to my *becoming* which is temporal. (Q, 308: 11-3/Gl., 231).

The " I " which sleeps eternally in the Godhead is the source of the **"I"** which is created in time.

And had I wished, there would be neither I nor all things. But were I not, so also would " God " not be. That God is " God," of that I am the cause. Were I not, so would God not be "God." **It** is not necessary to know this. (Q, 308: 21-5/Bl., 231)

The paradox of these assertions is exceeded only by their precision. Eckhart is speaking in a most exact way. Far from being muddled, Eckhart' s mysticism testifies to an extreme depth and sharpness of thought. [14]

The return of the soul to the Godhead constitutes for Eckhart a completion of the circle of being. The circle begins with the emergence of things from out of the Godhead which, when creatures look back and behold the source from which they emerge, is then called " God." But the circle is completed only when the soul returns back upon itself by withdrawing from everything created and penetrating to the Godhead in whose depths the source of all things lies concealed. The first movement Eckhart calls *"Ausfiiessen,"* the fl.ow out. This word of course has the Neoplatonic ring **of"** emanation," but what Eckhart means is creation. The second he calls the " *Dumhbruch,"* the breakthrough to the Godhead: [15]

A great master says that his breaking through is more noble than his flowing out, and that is true. When I flowed out of God all things spoke out: God is. But this cannot make me blessed, for I know myself in this way as a creature. But in the breakthrough, where I stand divested of my own will and of the will of God and of all His works and of God Himself, there I am beyond

[14] Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 71. One should understand that for Meister Eckhart the essence of a thing is its uncreated exemplar and that its created actuality is an *esse secundum* by which the thing exists but is not truly what it is. Essence is uncreated and one; existence is created and dispersed. See Lossky, pp. 146-57.

[15] The Blakney translation of this passage is practically useless. The "great master " to whom Meister Eckhart refers is unknown.

all creatures and I am neither "God" nor creature, but rather what I was and what I will remain now and ever more. (Q, 308: 25-32/Bl.,

The phase of return is higher than that of emergence (cf. Q, 260: 36-261: 9/Cl., 217). For the flowing out terminates in creatures, in the distinction between God and the world. But the breakthrough to the Godhead regains what had been lost by the flowing out. It rejoins creation with the creator so radically that there remains neither creature nor creator but only the eternal darkness of the Godhead. All distinction is overcome and there remains only the undivided One. God's flowing forth is intended to become a flowing back, for only then is the meaning of creation fulfilled. And it is in the ground of the soul that this consummation takes place. For the soul not only rejoins itself with God but it finds all creatures there too where, as eternal exemplars, they are all one (Cusanus's *coincidentia. oppositorum)* and all God (Q, 197: 2-4/Cl., 207). Eckhart's thought is thus animated by the model of the *e'.litus* of all things from God and their *reditus* back into God, as was indeed the *Summa. Theologiae* of "brother Thomas." [16]

There is no greater poverty than that accompanied by the *reditus,* the breakthrough, for in it the bounty of God's creation is given back to God. The glories of heaven and earth are abdicated for the "wasteland" of the Godhead. Man himself is surrendered for his true being and essence in the Godhead. There can be no greater poverty than that which gives back oneself, and all creation and even the creator Himself to its origin:

God finds no more place in man, for man attains with this poverty that which he has eternally been and will evermore remain. Here God is one with the spirit, and that is the most authentic poverty which one can find. (Q, 309: 4-7/Bl., 232)

This is the climax and completion of Eckhart's sermon and it is, to my mind, the peak of his mystical speculation. But there is still more to be said.

[16] Dempf, pp.

The Birth of the Son

In following the lead of the sermon *"Beati pauperes,"* we have thematized the motif of poverty and simplicity, of the soul and of God. But there is, as we said in the beginning of this paper, another theme in Eckhart's writings which is equally essential for understanding his thought, one which is not touched on in this sermon. For not only is God one, but He is also a process.[17] Not only is He substance, but also relation. God is the living process by which the Father gives birth to the Son and the two together give rise to the Holy Spirit. The importance of this for Eckhart' s mysticism is that Eckhart holds that the birth of the Son in eternity is extended to the soul, so that the soul itself is regenerated as that Son. Many commentators hold without further ado that the birth of the Son in the soul is the fundamental thought in Eckhart's work. However one must recognize a certain difficulty in that claim. For on the one hand Eckhart tells us in " *Beati pauperes"* and similar sermons that the essence of the mystical union is found in the nameless unity of the ground of the soul with the ground of God *beyond* all Trinitarian relationships. The teaching on the birth of the Son in the soul, on the other hand, which is the central theme of many other sermons, identifies the mystical union with union with the Son, a union which is as it were stopped short with one of the Persons and which does not penetrate to the Godhead. These do indeed seem to be different ideas and it is not at all clear at first sight how they are related to one another.[18]

But before we try to unravel how the birth of the Son is related to the breakthrough to the Godhead, we must first of all discuss just what Eckhart means by the birth of the Son. Once again, it seems to me, the best place to start is to go back to Thomas Aquinas, this time to his teachings on grace.[19] In

[17] On Eckhart as process philosopher see John Loeschen, " The God Who Becomes: Eckhart on the Divine Relativity," *The Thomist* XXV (1971),

[18] The question is the central theme of Ueda's book.

[19] Cf. Dempf, pp. 61-4; Ueda, pp. 91-7. See also Hugo Rahnel':, "Die Gottesgeburt: Die Lehre der Kirchenvater von der Gerburt Christi im Herzen

question llO of the *Prima Secundae* Aquinas argues that grace is a quality created by God in the soul. He holds that grace is not a virtue, which is a habit of perfection that belongs to the faculties of the soul. Rather grace is a quality which modifies the substance of the soul, raising it up to a participation in the divine nature. Grace itself is in an accidental way what God is substantially (S. T., I-II, llO, 2, ad 2m). This elevation of the substance of the soul spills over into its faculties-the intellect and the will-raising them up thereby to a share in supernatural life. By grace the intellect is perfected with the " theological virtue " of faith, and the will with charity:

> ... grace, being prior to virtue, has a subject prior to the powers of the soul, so that it is in the essence of the soul. For just as man through the intellectual power participates in the divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and through the power of will participates in the divine life through the virtue of charity, so also through the nature of the soul does he participate in the divine nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or recreation. (S. T., I-II, no, 4, c)

Grace confers an accidental deification upon the soul which makes it over into the image of God Himself.

St. Thomas's teachings on grace served as the point of departure for Eckhart's doctrine of the birth of the Son, and when Meister Eckhart was accused of holding that the soul was the Son, he would in his defense invoke the authority of his Dominican brother who had only recently been canonized. But once again Eckhart gives St. Thomas's doctrine a significance and force that it did not possess in Aquinas's own writings. He" interiorizes" Aquinas's teaching and draws out from it its most extreme consequences for the concrete life of the soul with God.

In the opening paragraph of Sermon 57 (" *Dum medium silentium* ") (Q, 415: 3-8/Bl., 95), Eckhart alludes to three different births. The first is the birth of the Son in eternity,

der Gliiubigen," *Zeitschrift fur Katholische Theologie 59* (1933), 333-418; see especially p. 411.

which is the process by which the Second Person of the Trinity is generated. The second is the birth of the Son in time, which is the Incarnation of the Son in the humanity of Christ. The third birth, our own existential rebirth, is referred to by St. Augustine:

> What does it help me if this birth is always happening and yet does not happen in me? But everything depends upon the fact that it does happen in me. (Q, 415: 4-8/Bl., 95)

Eckhart calls the process within God by which the three persons are generated a "*bullitio,*" a welling up and filling of itself with its own divine life. But this *bullitio* passes over into an *ebullitio,* a spilling over of the pent-up life of God into creatures. (LW, II, 21-2/Cl., The first spilling over is the Incarnation; the second is the extension of the birth of the Son into the soul. Of course this birth cannot take place in just any soul, but only in the souls of good men (Q, 415: 9-11/Bl., 95). In order to receive this birth the soul must keep itself pure and simple and clear of all creatures. If the Father is to "speak" His Word into the soul, the soul must be silent, i. e., pure of all images and concepts, and all attachment to created things. Thus the Father cannot speak in any of the soul's faculties, for these are concerned with creatures and the likenesses of creatures, but only in the ground of the soul (Q, 416: 30-417/Bl., 96-7). So too St. Thomas had said that grace is implanted in the substance of the soul and not in its powers.

But in what way does the Father bear His Son in the soul? Is there not a difference between the eternal Son and the Son born in the soul? Eckhart denies this:

> The Father bears His Son in eternity like to Himself. But beyond this I say: He has born Him out of my soul ... and the Father bears IIis Son in the soul in the same way as He bears Him in eternity and in no other way ... and I still say more: He bears me as His Son and as the same Son. (Q, 185: 13-21/Cl., 188)

What is missing in these formulations is St. Thomas's use of the word "participation" in the life of the Son, which implies

the distinction between the Son by nature and the Son by grace, or between the substantial life of God and an accidental participation in it. Eckhart's language is more audacious and unqualified. Eckhart says we are generated *as* the Son and as the *same* Son. In his defense before the Inquisition Eckhart toned his language down (Thery, 226/Bl., 303) and he said that he meant what St. Thomas meant (Thery, 199/Bl., 268). But he also explained that there is only one Son, and that if we are indeed made sons by grace then we are made sons by the same Son. It is the same process which takes place in the soul of the detached man as in eternity. There is only one Son and we are all one in Him.

It is important at this point to understand something of Eckhart's metaphysics, particularly as it relates to the question of the relationship between God and creatures, if we are to properly understand the relation between the eternal Son and the soul which is regenerated as the Son. Aquinas had said that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* and that creatures exist in virtue of a created participation in the divine being. He said that creatures are real, that they exist in the proper sense of the word, but that their existence is limited and contingent. His commentators speak in this connection of an analogy of proper proportionality: both creatures and God exist in the proper sense of the word, but each in a way proportioned to its own essence. Meister Eckhart took over Aquinas's assertion and inverted it. Eckhart said: *esse est deus*[11] being is God (LW, I, 156, Prol. n. 12). This proposition is considerably stronger than Aquinas's statement, *deus est suum esse,* God is His own (act of) being. It makes it considerably more difficult to explain how, if being is God, creatures exist, i. e., have being. Indeed Eckhart did not hesitate to say that creatures are a pure nothing (Q, 171: 9-18/Cl., 173). What he meant was that creatures are nothing apart from their relationship to God, for nothing can be except by being, as white things are white by whiteness itself. But being is God. He meant to stress the radical dependence of creatures upon God. But more importantly he meant to say

that creatures are but shadows and likenesses of being itself. They do not" have" being, but their being is" lent," borrowed, image-like, even as the truly poor in spirit "have nothing." He used suggestive metaphors to explain this. He said that creatures have being the way air has light. The air is illuminated only so long as and to the extent that the sun shines. Or creatures have being the way the image in the mirror does. It is there only so long as the face, which is the " original," looks into it. In Eckhart's metaphysics there is no allowance for the proper and proportionate being of creatures. There is only the mystic's insistence on the dependence and shadowy reality of created things. In Eckhart, there is no analogy of proportionality, but only of what the scholastics call "attribution." Creatures have being because they are related to God who *is* being.[20]

Eckhart's is a metaphysics of *esse ab alio,* of dependence in being, of the " image," the " son," of " lent being." Thus, there runs throughout his writings the motifs of bearing, of being brought forth, of the dependence of what is brought forth on its progenitor. The just man is engendered by Justice itself. The Son is eternally a process of being generated by the Father. The created being is of itself nothing, not even a little bit. And so, just as Eckhart modified Aquinas's teaching that God is His own being to his own liking, so does he modify Aquinas's teaching on grace. He stresses not that the soul has a separate and proportionate share of God's divine life, proportioned to the capacity of the created nature to receive this supernatural elevation; rather he stresses the *unity* of the soul with the Son. There is only one Son (just as there is only one being, which is God) and we are made sons through and in that Son. We draw our being as sons from the Son. There can be no

••On Eckhart's doctrine of analogy see Lossky, pp. 81!l-!W, 888-7 and, on its application to the birth of the Son in the soul, pp. 858-69; Josef Koch, "Zur Analogielehre Meister Eckharts," *Melanges offerts a Etienne Gilson* (Paris: 1960), pp. 827-50. Reiner Schiirmann argues that the language of analogy is ultimately unsuitable for expressing Eckhart's views; see his *Maitre Eckhart ou la joie errante* (Paris: Editions planete, 1972), pp. 829-40.

division between us and the Son, otherwise we would not be sons at all. In the defense documents he says we are sons "by analogy," but the analogy is that of proportion not proper proportionality (Thery, 266-8/Bl., 303-4). Eckhart is not saying that the soul is the Son, no more than he would say that creatures are God. But he does stress the radical dependence of the soul upon the Son and its radical unity with the Son if it is to be called a Son. And of course that *is* what we are called:

> Think of the love that the Father has lavished upon us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are. (I John 3: 1)

Now we may return to the question which we first raised in the beginning of this discussion of the birth of the Son. How does the birth of the Son relate to the union of the ground of the soul with the ground of God? In one case the soul is said to unite with the Son, in the other to surpass the Son and to break through to the divine Godhead itself. In order to answer this question let us observe that the condition under which the birth of the Son takes place is the same as the condition of the breakthrough to the Godhead: viz., that the soul divest itself of everything created, that it become pure of all self-love, empty of creatures. That is, the *detached* soul, the poor in spirit, is one in which *both* the birth of the Son and the breakthrough to the Godhead take place. Unity with the Son and unity with the Godhead are inseparable; it is not possible to achieve one without the other. But this is not to say that they are the same. What Eckhart seems to me to suggest is that it is *because* the ground of the soul and the ground of God are one that the Father engenders the Son in the soul. In other words, the very order which obtains in God also obtains in the soul. ·For in God the abyss of His Godhead is prior to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons are relationships which arise out of the divine essence, but they arise with the necessity of nature. Thus because the soul is united with the Godhead, the same relationships spring up in it as spring up in God, i. e., the Father engenders His Son in the soul and they mutually engender the Holy Spirit. For

God is one, and wherever the Godhead is so also will the Trinitarian relationships spring up. That explains why Eckhart sometimes says that I am not only the Son but also the Father, and that not only am I engendered by the Father but that I too engender the Son:

> Out of this purity He [=the Father] has begotten me eternally as His only begotten Son in the self-same image of His eternal Fatherhood, so that I may be the Father and bear Him by Whom I am born . . . In the same stroke, when He bears His only begotten Son in me, I bear Him back in the Father. (Q, 258: 19-22, 80-1/Cl., 214)

Because the soul is united with the Godhead which is the source of the Trinitarian relationships, these same relationships are reenacted within the soul, and the soul is said to " cooperate " in the generation of the Persons. The soul " cobears " the Son:

> For the Eternal Father bears His etemal Son in the soul without intermission so that this power [=the ground of the soul] cobears the Son of the Father and itself as the same Son in the unique power of the Father. (Q, 161: 25-8/Cl., 135)

Or again, the soul as the Son unites with the Father and the two together "well up in the Holy Spirit," (Q, 185: 21-4/Cl., 188). The soul does not merely passively undergo the birth of the Son but actively bears Him, and that is possible only if the soul unites not only with the Son but with the Father, which is itself possible only if the soul unites with the very fount of all the Trinitarian relationships.[21]

In actively bearing the Son Eckhart says the soul, which hitherto was a "virgin," now has become "fruitful." The virgin is the soul which is free of all creatures and created likenesses and all attachment to the self. But the virgin is not the final or highest state accessible to the soul:

> " Wife " is the noblest name which one can apply to the soul, and it is much nobler that " virgin." That man should *receive* God in Himself is good; in this receptivity he is a virgin. But that

[21] Thus S. Ueda says that the active birth of the Son leads us back to the breakthrough to the Godhead {p. 131).

God should become fruitful in him is better. For becoming fruitful by a gift is alone thankfulness for the gift. And the spirit is a wife in the thankfulness of rebirth when it bears Jesus back again in God's fatherly heart. (Q, 159: 33-160: 8/Cl., 134).

This text tells us that the detached soul is virginal and that, cast in the image of eros, the unity of the naked soul with the naked Godhead must be crowned and periected by giving birth. That is, the breakthrough to the Godhead is related to the birth of the Son as virginity is to progenitorship. The virgin must become a wife. The *tabula rasa* must give birth to the r' concept." Being empty of creatures means to become filled with God.[22]

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We have therefore two contrasting formulations of the relationship between the breakthrough to the Godhead and the birth of the Son. In the one, the breakthrough to the Godhead is *more radical* than the birth of the Son and indeed the ground and basis of it. In the other, the birth of the Son *crowns* and *perfects* the unity with the Godhead as fruitfulness perfects virginity. But these two formulations are not incompatible. They belong together dialectically. For what is more radical is not necessarily complete; the root must give birth to the tree which flowers and bears fruit. From the unity of the divine ground the Trinity of Persons wells up. From the soul's unity with the divine ground the whole life of the Trinity reproduces itself in the soul so that the soul can be engendered as that Son and indeed give birth to Him again. The unity with the Godhead is the ground and foundation of the birth of the Son. But the birth of the Son makes the virgin a wife; it makes the wasteland fruitful. Unity with the Godhead is more radical than the birth of the Son; unity with the Son is more personal and loving than unity with the Godhead. Unity with the Godhead is the *basis* of the mystical union; the birth of the Son is its *completion.*[23]

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•• For an excellent discussion of the virgin, the wife and the active birth of the Son, see R. Schiirmann, pp.

·[3] For an argument for the priority of the breakthrough over the birth of the Son see Ueda, pp. rnI-5, 141-5; cf. also Schiinnann, !?97-9.

Unlike " brother Thomas " Eckhart is not the common doctor who teaches a doctrine which all can understand. He is rather a master of the depth-dimension, a very un-common doctor, whose sermons introduce us to a rare and exalted religious experience. Meister Eckhart is no theoretician of this experience; he does not speak " about" it, but "from out of " it. His word to us is not to analyze Meister Eckhart' s sermon on poverty, but to *be* poor, to *have* the poverty of which he speaks. He is a master not only of words and books *(Lesemeister)* , but of life itself *(Lebemeister)* .

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THREE STRANDS IN THE THOUGHT OF ECKHART, THE SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGIAN

ECKHART THE MYSTIC is the Eckhart who attracts readers these days. But often he is appreciated for the ideas he shares with other mystics, non-Christian as well as Christian, rather than for the specific theological issues with which he struggled.

To accept uncritically the statement that Eckhart dis.solved the Christian dogmas of the Trinity and Incarnation into an impersonal *Gotthei,t* indistinguishable from the Absolute of oriental mysticism [1] is to neglect the fact that Eckhart was by profession a scholastic theologian. Although he became a popular preacher, even his German sermons .show a constant effort to correlate spiritual experience and Christian dogma by the highly technical methods of university scholasticism.[2] If one looks only at the technical language of an Aquinas, an Eckhart, or a Bonaventure one can facilely reduce their thought to the philosophies from which their diverse languages derive, but this ignores the fact that for them such language is only a tool for the translation of a Biblical revelation which remains the essential message.

[1] E.g. Walter Stace, *Time and Eternity* (Princeton: University Press, 195!l), pp. 153 ff. F-0r a criticism of this see R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: University Press, 1961). Frits Staal concludes modestly, "We have surveyed some of the many religious and philosophical evaluations and interpretations of mystical experiences. . . . This immense variety is consistent with an equally immense variety of experiences, but it is also consistent with a very small number of basic experiences, -0r even with one kind of basic experience. We cannot determine this at present." *Exploring Mysticism* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 178.

• On Eckhart's significance as the founder of German vernacular preaching see Udo M. Nix and R. Ochslin, *Meister Eckhart der Prediger* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960).

Three strands in Eckhart's thought must be distinguished and then interrelated. Eckhart began teaching just at the time when the Dominican Order was beginning to insist on uniform adherence to Thomism by all its members. Eckhart, however, still felt free to pursue a very different direction, but he always attempted to correlate his own thought with the characteristic Thomistic positions.[8]

A second strand is not academic but experiential. At this time mystical life was flourishing not only in German religious houses but also among the laity. Already in Germany in the 12th century the Benedictine nuns Hildegarde of Bingen and Elizabeth of Schonau had written mystical works in the manner of St. Bernard. This tradition spread not without abberation[4] among the Beguines and Beghards, those devout women and men who lived at home or in communities independent of the canonical formalities of religious life. In the 13th century the Beguine Mechtilde of Magdeburg (d. circa 1282) had inspired the Benedictine nuns of Helfta, including Mechtilde of Hackebourn (d.1295) and Gertrude the Great (d. 1302).[5]

• In 1286 all Dominican teachers were required to promote Thomistic positions "at least as to opinions." However, "The Order applied this degree benignly. Friars were to promote and defend the doctrine of Thomas and must not attack it, but they were not forbidden to engage in original speculation of their own. They were unmolested so long as they did not assail Thomistic doctrine or depart blatantly from it. This is illustrated by the German Dominicans, who, though they knew and studied the works of Thomas, also followed the Neoplatonic trend initiated by Albert the Great, such men as Hugh of Ripelin, uirich of Strassburg, Meister Eckhart, Berthold of Moosburg and Theodoric of Freiburg. . . . Furthermore the Thomistic school itself had not yet developed its cohesiveness." William A. Hinnebusch, *The; History of the Dominican Order* (New York: Alba House, 1965-78), II, p. *155* f. The crack-down came *as* a result of the controversy over Durandus of St. and James of Metz (who were Parisian colleagues of Eckhart) in the general chapters of 1390 to 1329.

•Auguste Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au nwyen age et au sefaieme siecle* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Minerva, 1964); and Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

•Jean Leclercq, F. Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality;* vol. II, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (New York: Desclee, 1968)' pp. 878 ff.

Mechtilde of Magdeburg was under the spiritual direction of a Dominican, Henry of Halle.[6] From this period Dominican preachers played an important role in fostering the mystical life among religious. Eckhart during his studies in the Order at Erfurt and Cologne must have been well acquainted with this mysticism long before he went to Paris for his university studies and teaching and in later life he became deeply involved in it as preacher and spiritual director.

This mysticism was marked by special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.[7] Today we tend to think of this as sentimental, but at that time it was understood as a concentration on the *interior* life of Jesus both in its affective and cognitive aspects, since biblically the " heart " symbolizes self-awareness. Of course all spirituality deals with interior life, but a comparison of these northern mystics with such southern contemporaries as Catherine of Siena or Vincent Ferrer [8] shows that the Germans thematized " innerness " as such, anticipating that concern for " subjectivity " which has marked the whole course of German thought.[9] This theme became for Eckhart the central reality which required not only homiletic expression but also scholastic analysis.

The third strand was Neo-Platonic philosophy; it supplied the technical categories for this scholastic analysis. St. Albert the Great had been Aquinas's teacher from whom Aquinas drew his Aristotelianism, but other disciples such as Dietrich of Freiburg and Ulrich of Strassburg were more influenced by Albert's commentaries on the Christian Neo-Platonist, Pseudo-Dionysius.1-0 Eckhart took this latter path, and made extensive

•Henry of Halle may have been a pupil of St. Albert the Great; cf. Mary Jeremy, *Scholars and Mystics* (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), p. *25.*

[1] C. Vagaggini, "La devotion au Sacre Coeur chez Ste. Mechtilde et Ste. Gertrude" in *Cor Jesu* (Rome, 1957), II, p. 28-48. A. Walz, *De Veneratione Divini Cordis Jesu in 0. P.* (Rome, Angelicum, 1987).

[8] Hinnebusch, *op. cit.,* pp. 841 ff.

•Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Tkeologie negative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maltre Eckhart* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), p. 216, n. 179.

[10] Etienne Gilson, *His.tory of Christian PhUosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 481-42, and Notes pp. 750-58.

use of the works of Proclus translated by the Dominican William of Moerbeke in 1268.[11]

In this philosophy Eckhart found categories more convenient for dealing with the " subjectivity " of mystical experience than Aristotle's uncompromisingly objectivist epistemology. Aristotelians always want to arrive at the inner nature of man through his interactions with the outer world of sense-experience. Eckhart preferred to begin from inner experience. When we read the dry outlines preserved for us of the sermons of the Aristotelian Thomas Aquinas [12] and compare them with the vivid, moving sermons of Eckhart we can feel some sympathy with Eckhart's choice of philosophy.

Created and Uncreated Grace

The nature of the "inner man " is so often the topic of both the sermons and the scholastic works, that we are there confronted with his conception of grace which at once marks Eckhart off from non-Christian mystics. In the *Defense* of his *Book of Divine Comfort* he wrote for his inquisitors: [13]

1. The first article [cited as unorthodox] is: He who should innocently believe, speak or write of, anything uncreated in the soul, as a part of the soul, would not be a heretic or damned. And he adds that the Master of the Sentences died believing, teaching and writing that there is no created habit of charity in the soul, but the soul is moved only by the uncreated Holy Spirit.

Thus Eckhart kept to the older view of Peter Lombard whose *Sentences* was the standard theological textbook of scholasticism [14] as against the view strongly supported by Aquinas

[11] G. Verbeke, " Guillaume de Moerbeke: traducteur de Proclus," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain,* 51 (1953), 349-73.

[12] As to the question of the authenticity of the sermons see James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas. d'Aquino* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 401-03.

[13] A. Daniels, *Eine lateinische Rechtfertigungsschrift des Meister Eckhart;* Clemens Baeumker, *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters,* Bd. XXIll, Heft *5,* VI, 1, p. 6. See also Tht\ry's edition in the *Archives d'histoire doctrinal et litteraire du Mayen Age,* I (1926), 128-268.

[14] See O. Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII• et XIII• siecles* (Louvain: Gembloux, III, 1949), pp. 100 f. and 200; excerpts from H. Rondet, *Gratia Christi*

according to which " grace " .signifies not only the " favor of God toward us," and the Holy Spirit as the personal gift which expresses this favor, but also a *quality* of the human person especially created in us by God to make us a " new creation " (Gal. 6: 15). For Aquinas such a quality is not a static but a dynamic reality which establishes a relation of dependence and communication between the creature and God. This relation is what the Scriptures speak of as "sonship" *(Gal.* 4: 6-7), which makes it possible for us to relate to God in faith, hope and love (J *Cor.* 13) .[15]

However, this notion of " created grace " can easily be misunderstood, so it is no longer seen as a relation of dependence on God but is *substantialized* so that grace becomes a" thing" which we possess in our own right so as to become independent of God. Undoubtedly it was this substantialized conception of grace which the Reformers rejected as neo-Pelagian.[16] Nevertheless, any such rejection leaves us still with the problem of explaining how we are transformed so as to be united to God. Contemporary with Eckhart, St. Gregory Palamas in the Orthodox Church tried to meet this problem with his famous theory of the " uncreated energies " of God by which man is " deified " without any pantheistic identification with God.[11] Eckhart was occupied with the same problem but approached it in a different way.

The Plenitude of Thought

Eckhart's *Parisian Questions* [18] are the result of his professorships in Paris in 130Q-3 and 1311-14. In 130Q-3 he engaged in

(Paris: Beauchesne, 1948) in E. Fortman, *The Theology of Man and Grace* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), pp. 173 ff.

[15] *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 90, aa. 1-3. ·

[16] See H. Hermelink, " Grace in the Theology of the Reformers: Luther and Melanchthon" in W. T. Whitley, ed., *The Doctrine of Grace* (London: SCM Press, 1931), pp. 176-!WS.

[17] Jean Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Lond{}ll: Faith Press, 1964).

[18] The *Pamian Questions and Prologues* are a helpful introduction; ef. the recent translation by Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974).

a controversy with the Franciscan Gonzalvo of Balboa over a central issue of the day on which Aquinas had taken an emphatic stand: "Whether the Intellect or the Will is superior?" Eckhart's first *quaestio* poses this problem in a different way: "Whether in God Being *(esse)* and Thought *(intelligere)* are the same?" His affirmative answer is perfectly Thomistic,[19] but with a difference.

Thomas had taught that while *esse* and *intelligere* are identical in God, nevertheless, among the concepts we use to describe God the order is *being, life, thought,* so that when we say God is "Thought" we must understand this as a consequence of the fact he is Being. Thus in *Exodus* 3:14 the name of God, "I am who am," rightly expresses God as absolute Being.[20] Eckhart, however, reverses this order to claim that the most proper name of the unnameable God is "Thought." God is called "Being" only because as pure Thought he is also the creator of all other things to which He gives being. He is called "Being" because He is the cause of being in creatures, but he is called "Thought" because that is his *inner* nature. For all Eckhart's theology this *interiority* of God is the the starting point.

In later works Eckhart is more cautious. He makes clear that he by no means intends to deny God is pure Being, but he never gives up his fundamental contention that God is best named as Thought.[21] In this, of course, he was in line with the intellectualism of his Order in contrast to the Franciscan emphasis on the will. Eckhart goes further than Aquinas, since Aquinas constantly emphasizes the primacy of love in earthly spiritual life while Eckhart only occasionally touches this theme.[22]

[19] And so the great 17th century Thomist John of St. Thomas argued that the terms "Being" and "Thought" when analogically applied to God have significations which are not even different by a *distinctio rationis. Curms Theologicus,* Solesme ed. (Paris: Desclee, 1931), Tom. II, pp. 336-48 and editor's note, I, p. 153.

[20] *Sum. theol.* I, q. 13, aa. 8-11; I, q. 14, a. 4.

[21] *Commentary on Exodus, Lateinische Werke* (Stuttgart, 1936), II, pp. 20 ff. (The Latin and German works will be referred to as *LW* and *DW.)*

[22] For example, in *LW* IV, *Sermo vi,* pp. *50* ff; *SMmo xxx,* pp. 271 ff; *SMmo xl,* pp. 335 ff; and in *DW* Ill, *Predigt 65,* pp. 521 ff.

From this strong appreciation l")f mind Eckhart works out in a Neo-Platonic yet highly original manner his own Christian theology. As Vladimir Lossky has beautifully shown,[23] for Eckhart the Trinity is best understood if we name the Father as Thought, who by the very fact that he is pure Thought is the One, the plenitude of Being. The Son is the Word expressing the plenitude of this Thought, and the Spirit is the Love *(ardor)* by which thought and expression return to perfect Unity. This overflowing plenitude is not, as in Neo-Platonism, a *descent* from a higher to a lower, nor simply a turning back of the Third Person to contemplate the First in an *ascent* to the origin. Eckhart is orthodox in believing that the Son is the perfect and therefore equal Image of the Father completely expressing the Father's plenitude, while the Spirit asserts this perfect equality and, therefore, perfect unity.

Some commentators suspect that Eckhart was really a unitarian monist whose Trinitarian statements were merely modalistic, subtle concessions to orthodoxy.[24] They point out that for Eckhart creation is a continuation of the same process by which the Word proceeds from the Father. Hence the soul in its mystic ascent passes beyond all creatures, then beyond the Divine Persons, and comes to rest only in the pure One of the Godhead. This interpretation neglects the fact that Eckhart as a theologian is concerned to explain Christian doctrine in such a way as to preserve its orthodox sense yet to render it intelligible in the Neo-Platonic categories which he has chosen as his tool of systematisation. Neo-Platonism requires that all reality should be ultimately reduced to Absolute Unity. Therefore, Eckhart argues that the Godhead cannot be named in

•• *Op. cit.,* pp. S58 ff.

•• "This leaning to transcendental speculation, landing him at last in a monism which-did we judge him by his formal declarations-can hardly be reconciled with Christianity, was combined with a simple and homely pastoral effort. Intellectual processes might lead to the discovery of **a'** bare' and impersonal divinity, unoccupied with time and space, and to the logical demand for a similar abstraction on the part of ' sanctified ' souls. But a deep religious sensitiveness modified this inhuman aloofness." Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Churnh* (New York: Doran, p. IS4 f.; Reiner Schiirmann, *Maitre Eckhart ou la joie errante* (Paris: Planete, p. 14S.

abstraction from the Divine Persons because, as a concrete reality,. it is identical with the Father who is the One. Yet the Father in his absolute unity is Thought, a plenitude of Being which possesses itself by the procession of the Word and the spiration of the Spirit of Unifying Love. This interior life of God is externally continued in creation, but only in an analogical way.

In the mystical ascent neither creation nor the Divine Persons are exposed as illusory. What is overcome are the human images and concepts by which we think (a) of creatures as having a being independent of God, (b). of " God" as if he is adequately revealed in his creation, and (c) of the Divine Persons as having any nature except the Godhead as it is given by the Father to the Son and mutually enjoyed by Father and Son in the Spirit.[25] Eckhart, as theologian, explained the mystical experience of " oneness " as a purification of our intelligence of every notion which obscures the ultimate truth that *inrwardly* the One is the identity of the Persons with the Godhead in whom the Godhead exists only in its processional plentitude from the Father. For Eckhart, any notion of Unity which would obliterate the Per:sons would be the imposition of an inadequate human concept on the unnameable Godhead.

The Poverty of Creatures

Since the Triune Life of God is wholly interior to the One, it is not an exterior descent into plmality as in Neo-Platonism. Consequently Eckhart did not have to understand creation ar1 a necessary emanation of the world from God, as Plotinus did. God does not create because his nature demands it, but because he freely wills to do so. Yet this freely created universe is an imaging of God. Just as a mirror has no light but what it reflects, so for Eckhart the created universe has no being of its own.[26] Its being, goodness, and beauty are nothing more

[25] Lossky, *op. cit.*, pp. 841 f., *859-865.*

[26] "All creatures are pure nothing; I do not say they have a little or some being but that they are pure nothing, since no creature has *ease," Defense* (Thery) article 15, p. 184 with the response on p. *205.*

than God's own Being, Goodness, and Beauty reflected more or less dimly. While this is very close to the Platonic doctrine that the universe is an imitation of the Divine, it differs radically because this reflection is not due to necessity but to the free act of God. It is *grace,* and Eckhart does not hesitate to call creation as well as redemption acts of grace.[27] Yet the reality of this gift is the Light of God-God Himself freely shining in the mirror of creatures.

The universe achieves its perfection by this reflection or " return to God," by assimilation to the creative ideas of things which exist eternally in God the Creator. It is in this sense that Eckhart daringly asserted that "creation is eternal." He meant that the creature exists eternally in God both in the divine idea from which it came and to which it must return by God's free predestination. Thus the creation itself is not *outside* God, except in the sense that creatures reflect the Divine Image imperfectly, either by reason of their finitude or their sin, but the universe with such reality as is proper to it exists inside God.[29] It seems that in this way Eckhart found his own way of overcoming the growing nominalist tendency in the first half of the 14th century to atomize the universe into autonomous monads linked only by the Sovereign Will of God.[30] For him, just as the Word is spoken within God, so the universe is created within God, although in a finite manner which makes it exterior to God as compared to the perfect interiority of the Divine Word. Eckhart, therefore, is no pantheist.

From this it follows that it is possible for us to say paradoxically that God is Nothing (Non-Being), because he is not simply Being but Thought which is the cause of Being yet beyond it; and we can also say that the creature is nothing, because the being it has is a pure gift which is never inde-

[27] See Lossky, pp. ff.

[98] See *Defense* (Daniels), IX, answer to the article, p. 44.

[29] See Bernard J. Muller-Thym, *The Establishment of the University of Being in the Doctrine of Meis.ter Eckhart of Hochheim* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1988), p. 18 ff.

[80] See Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham* (Manchester: University Pl'.ess, 1975).

pendently its own. God also is Silence in the sense that he needs no word outside himself, since his Word is perfectly spoken within; but the world also is silence, because its only perfection consists in being open to God's word.[31]

The inner Word of God which proceeds from the Father is the same Word that is exteriorly reflected in the imperfect order of the world. Thus the eternal procession is expressed in the temporal procession of creation in one continuous process, and the Word of God shines out in creation. Most perfectly this Word is reflected in the Incarnation, because in Christ's two natures the interior Word and its exterior image in nature are united.[32] Eckhart shows little interest in "salvation history" but his theology does not deny the significance of Biblical events. Rather he sees in each of these events the same timeless Word manifesting itself in a variety of ways whose full significance, however, appears only in the Incarnation in Mary's womb.[33]

Faith as Poverty

From his view of the Trinity and Incarnation as plenitude, Eckhart's mystical doctrine of spiritual poverty directly follows. Protestant critics often contrast unfavorably what they understand to be the pantheistic doctrine of a *substantial* union with God and the Christian view proposed by Eckhart and his school with the Pauline doctrine that this union is effected only *relationally* by faith.[34] However, Eckhart also holds that the mys-

[31] On God as Not-Being see S. Ueda, *Die Gottesburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit* (Giitersloh: Mohn, 1965), pp. *115* f. On God as silence see *Expositio in Genesis, LW* I, p. *6fl,* n. 77.

[32] " The wisdom of God deigned to become flesh in such wise that this incarnation might mediate as it were between the procession of the Divine Persons and the production of creatures, partaking of the nature of both, so that this incarnation might be at once the exemplification of the eternal emanation [of the Word] and the exemplar of the whole inferior nature." *LW* Ill, p. 154.

[33] ••Bardo Weiss, *Die Heilsgeschichte bei Meister Eckhart* (Mainz: Matthias Griinewald, 1965) is a detailed study of Eckhart's attitude to history.

[34] ••On Tauler, cf. Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 85 ff. and U4 ff.

tical union is effected through faith. The theological problem, however, is how to understand that faith-relation.

Eckhart teaches that since we are created in the image of God who is Thought or Spirit *(John* 3:5-8), our bodily life is only the surface of human nature, which in its central depths is essentially spirit. But to be a spirit is to live inwardly where God Himself lives. Eckhart makes frequent use of Augustine's theme that " God is closer to the soul than the soul to itself." [35] Perhaps he also borrows from Dietrich of Freiburg the notion of the *abditum mentis* [36] when he speaks of the *ground* of the soul in which God's image is imprinted. [37] This is the divine "spark" *(scintilla animae, funklein)* or spiritual apex of man's being by which he transcends space and time. [38]

This might be correlated with Aquinas' *ratio superior,* but with a fundamental difference. [39] For Aquinas the image of God is found most perfectly in the faculties of intellect and will, or more precisely in their acts, above all the acts of faith, hope, and love. Eckhart, however, considers these faculties and acts too exterior because they are mere accidents of the soul. Consequently, for him the depth of the human person is not to be found in the faculties but in the substantial essence in which the faculties are rooted. [40] Thus the center of our being is hidden from our ordinary powers of thought, even of introspection. To enter into it we must go deeper than the plurality of faculties into the unity of our essential being.

Perhaps no charge against Eckhart has been so damaging as the repetition of his statements that the center of the soul is " uncreated and uncreatable." [41] His inquisitors and many modem readers have jumped to the conclusion that Eckhart thought that the mystical union is achieved not through grace

••E.G. *DW* III, *Predigt 68,* p. 14!'l.

[86] See Gilson, *op. cit.,* p. 437.

[87] *DW I, Predigt 15,* p. !'l53.

[88] See Schiirmann's discussion of the hist'Oryof such expressions, *op. cit.,* pp. 88-95.

•• *Su.m. theol.,* I. q. 79, a. 9, ad *!'l;* II-II, q. 74,, a. 7c.

••*Defense* (Daniels), IX, articles 5-8, p. 36-7.

[u] *Ibid.;* see the discussion in Lossky, op. cit., pp. !'l4!'lff.

and faith but through an awakening to our own intrinsic divinity. No doubt Eckhart's language here reaches the extreme of paradox, yet in the context of the principles we have already examined, such expressions can be sanely understood.

If for Eckhart every creature of itself is nothing, and only has being to the degree it mirrors the Being of God, it must also be true that our created intelligence is nothing more than a mirror for the Divine Light. However, our intelligence differs from our material body in the purity with which it mirrors God. Because it is spiritual, and because the " spark " is its most spiritual apex, it is perfectly transparent to the Divine Light, or it is a spotless mirror, wholly neutral to every quality or form and hence emptied to receive the Divine Light with the least distortion or obscuration.

In itself, therefore, the center *df* the soul was created to image God the Uncreated and it has no ,being of its own that could be given it by creation. Nothingness as such canot be created, it can only be the *ex nihilo* from which creation takes place. Thus paradoxically it is true to say that the depth of the sou] cannot be created, but can only reflect the Being of the Creator.

However, the spiritual depth in us is hidden from us now by the sinful desires which clog this pure mirror with false images. Only when it has been wiped clear and become a pure nothing can it reflect God in his image. The mirror is certain to reflect the Sun if the mirror is clean, because the Sun is always shining. Thus for Eckhart Christian faith is the simple reflection of God's Face, a total reflectivity of the Divine Light, or a complete, listening silence in the presence of his Word. This faith is a gift of God, but it is also a restoration of the original gift of God, prior to Adam's sin, the gift of an intelligence made to image its Maker. The mystical ascent, therefore, is not an awakening to our own divinity but a return to our original openness to God.

This openness to God Eckhart also calls the " birth of the Word" in us. By this birth we become true sons of God, not by a sonship which is our own but by the very sonship of the

Divine Son himself.[42] Thereby is accomplished our return to the *idea* of ourselves in God by which He created us, We no longer remain outside God, but we break through into the inner life of the Trinity where the Divine Persons are identical in the perfect communication of the Divine Nature.[43] Eckhart used the famous expression which Hegel cites in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* "The eye by which God sees me, is the eye by which I see Him."[44] Eckhart explained this by saying he meant only to paraphrase the Apostle's saying, "Then I shall know even as I am known" (I Cor. 13:12).[45] Thus it is only in the light of God that I discover my true self as God meant me to be; my true self is nothing but an image of God. This God is utterly transparent: pure light, because his inner being is pure consciousness, pure thought expressed in the Word and unified in the Spirit.

* * * *

Eckhart's scholastic method applied to the mystical experience of his time fashions a consistent whole determined by his fundamental conception that God the Unnameable is best named as Thought. In Biblical language this finds expression as the "Word." Eckhart drew from this speculative theology the practical ascetical spirituality which we find in his sermons: spiritual advance is a growth in poverty of spirit, an openness to the Word of God in the void of faith by which we come to realize that of ourselves we are nothing, but by the grace of God entirely his.[46]

Admittedly we miss in Eckhart any extensive development of a theology of Christ's Humanity. Nevertheless it was apparently not difficult for his followers, Henry Suso and John Tauler, to draw out of Eckhart's teachings a spirituality cen-

[42] *Defense* (Daniels), IX, article 57, p. 62 f.

[43] On the "*Durchbruch*" see Ueda, *op. cit.*, and Schiirmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 130 ff.

[44] G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen iiber die Philosophie der Rdigion,* 1 (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 228. *(Siimtliche Werke,* Glockner ed., vol. 15.).

[45] *Defense* (Daniels), IX, article 19, p. 42.

[46] *DW,* II, p. 492 ff.

tered in Christ. The Christ of their ecstasy was Christ crucified and so their theology of mystical heights was a veritable *theologia crucis*/[7] a practical interpretation of Christianity which was to exercise important influence upon the Reformation and Pietism.

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•• " Our Lord J.esus Christ was stripped naked when He was crucified. Not a stitch of clothing was left on His body, and right before His dying eyes his garments were gambled for. Now I know as sure as there is a God, that if thou shalt come to thy best spiritual state, thou must be stripped naked of every single thing that is not God-not one thing must remain to thee. And then all that thou hadst must be made a joke and a game before thy eyes and counted as nothing worth, and thy fellow men must reckon thee to be a fool. The Lord said, **'If** any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me' (Luke ." *The Sermons and Spiritual Conferences of John Tauler, the Illu'l'fi,inated Doctor,* translated by Walter Elliot (Washington: Apostolic Mission House, 1910), p. 701.

MEISTER ECKHART: HIS TIMES AND HIS WRITINGS

IN INDICATING SOME of the best modern studies of Eckhart's life and works one must begin with the writings of Josef Koch, whose death in 1967 was so great a loss.[1] His major achievement is the magisterial edition, still not complete, of the German and Latin works for the *Deutsche F<Yrschungsgemeinschaft* over which he and Josef Quint presided. This enterprise will continue to profit by the sound learning with which they inspired its inception and execution.

Romana Guarnieri displayed her wonted discrimination when she gained Koch's permission to publish two volumes of his essays.[2] These offer us some of his most important reflections on Eckhart's writings and on his times. It is true that in "Meister Eckhart: An Attempted Comprehensive Portrait"[a] he repeated some common errors which he was later to correct. Nonetheless, this study is to be commended for the conciseness (not always a German virtue) with which he describes for us the circumstances which were to determine the course of Eckhart's career: the increasing spread of heresy, notably that of 'Liberty of the Spirit,' and the power and authority which so came to be invested in inquisitorial proceedings; the' enlightenment,' fed from Greek, Arabic and Hebrew sources, increasingly influencing the arts, the sciences and theology in the universities; the bitter strife within the Church over papal supremacy.

[1] Some of this paper was read to a German class at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto two years ago, at the invitation of Professor E. Catholy. When Aquinas Institute asked me to contribute to the Eckhart symposium, the paper was revised and augmented in the light of Professor A. Maurer's recent publication of the *Parisi.an Questions.* I am deeply indebted to Mr. J. C. Marler for help and advice throughout the revision.

•*Kleine Schriften* vols., Rome, 1973).

[8] 'Meister Eckhart: Versuch eines Gesamtbildes' *(ibid.* 1 repr. fr. *Die Kirche in des Zeitenwende,* ed. O. Kuss and E. Kleineidam, 3rd edn., 1989).

Above all was the opposition to scholastic method and thought, especially as they were promoted by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, from those who treated scholasticism as paganism in disguise, from those who saw it as less objectionable but sought a return to Augustine's appeals to subjective experience, and from those who totally questioned the entire basis of the new philosophy and theology-" your speculations are certainly very edifying, but may not everything, under God's absolute power, be quite different?" [4] As Koch observed, Eckhart belonged neither to this school nor to any other, and in his sermons there are many passing remarks to show his impatience with what he regarded as the mechanical professionalism of the " great masters," and its irrelevance to " the birth of the Word in the soul," the dominant central theme of his teaching. Yet we can see in him, as in Peter John Olivi, Durandus of and William of Ockham, a depreci· ation of scholastic realism, which sought, or so they thought, to naturalize the supernatural, and on which account they wished to return to Augustine's personalism. How close an approximation, real or imagined, Eckhart's thinking was to the thought of these three men, we shall see.

The facts of Eckhart's life, well known if often controverted, are best presented in Koch's essay," Critical Studies of Meister Eckhart's Life ",[5] even though in this there are some conjectures to which one need not assent. Born c.1260 in Thuringia, he belonged to the Teutonia province of the Order of Preachers, then, when it was subdivided, to Saxonia. He taught in Paris, Strass.. burg and Cologne, held numerous responsible provincial offices, and was a great preacher. When catastrophe came, in 1826, and he was required to provide written defenses of articles extracted from his writings and alleged to he heretical, the three commissioners appointed by the archbishop of Cologne were able to draw on his considerable literary output. Let us briefly summarize what is known of his writings.

[4] *Ibid.* 202.

[5] 'Kritische Studien zum Leben Meister Eckharts' *(ibid.* I 247-846, repr. fr. *Archivum Fratrum Praedicaforum* 29, 1969, and 80, 1960).

The Works

We must distinguish between the German and the Latin works. In German, there is one fairly traditional spiritual treatise, *The Book of Divine Consolation,* written for the bereaved Queen Agnes of Hungary, which bears many marks of having been carefuly prepared for publication by Eckhart himself. Perhaps this is also true of the other treatises, *The Noble Man* (a sermon for the feast of St. Louis of France), *The Talks of Instruction* and *On Detachment;* [6] but it undoubtedly is not true of the German sermons. Quint in his critical edition of these [7] has so far accepted, from the large body of such material attributed to Eckhart, eighty-six sermons in all. His criteria are sound. If, in the document wherein Eckhart denied the authority and competence of the archbishop of Cologne's commissioners and. appealed for a hearing to the Holy See, the *Rechfertigungsschrift,* (that 'vindicatory document' in which he provides chapter and verse for what he had taught and what of it had been challenged) there is clear correspondence between such references and a surviving sermon, then there are grounds for accepting that sermon as genuine. Such is also the case if there is, as often occurs, close textual agreement between a German and a Latin sermon,[8] or between one German sermon, well-authenticated, and another less so, or if there are plain indications that a sermon in the projected, never executed *Opus sermonum* (or, as Eckhart sometimes calls it, *Opus expositionum)* would have contained matter already presented in a German sermon.[9] But to speak of a German sermon as ' genuine

•There are critical editions of all the treatises by Josef Quint in *Meister Eckharts Traktate (Die deutsche Werke-DW-5,* Stuttgart, 1963), and reliable modern English translations in J. M. Clark and J. V. Skinner: *Meister Eckhart: Selected Treatises and Sermons.* (London, 1957).

• DW. l, 2 and 3 (Stuttgart, 1958, 1971, 1976).

[8] In *Die lateinische Werke* (LW) there has so appeared vol. 4, *Magistri Eckhardi Sermones* (Stuttgart, 1956), ed. Ernst Benz, Bruno Decker and Koch, which appears to comprise all those admitted by the editors as genuine.

• On the problems of the *Opus* see Koch's introductory remarks to LW 4, pp. xxiii-xxviii,

Eckhart ' is not to he understood as meaning that he sat down and wrote out in full what he intended to say or had said. Like so many other sermons of the Middle Ages, these German ones are *reportationes,* accounts later written up by others, from hastily-scribbled notes, of what they remembered or thought that he had said in the pulpit. Such a method is notoriously liable to error; and we all know how often, even in our own electronic age, public figures can extricate themselves from invidious positions by claiming that they have been misreported. It is surprising, in view of the often corrupt condition of the surviving manuscripts, how seldom Eckhart has recourse to this, but in one place he does. He writes in the 'Vindicatory Document':

> I must say that I found in the sermon recently shown to me many things which I never said, and there is much in it which has no sense, obscure and confused and nightmarish. Therefore I have wholly rejected them.[10]

Koch observes[11] that the categorization of the articles in Eckhart's condemnation shows by the findings on the last two articles that, when he said that a proposition was something he had never taught, Avignon believed him.

Among the surviving Latin works there are, in addition to the ' Vindicatory Document ' and the Latin sermons, first of all the Scriptural commentaries: the *Exposition of the Book of Genesis,* dealing with the literal sense, and the *Book of the Parables of Genesis,* concerned with the allegorical sense,[12] the commentaries on Exodus, Ecclesiasticus chapter 24 and Wisdom,[13] and on John's Gospel,[14] which last Koch called 'by far

[10] Koch, *Kleine Schriften* I SIS.

[11] *Ibid.* I

[19] Ed. Konrad Weiss, *Magistri Echardi Prologi, expositio libri Genesis, Liber parabolarum Genesis* LW 1, Stuttgart, 1964).

[18] Ed. Weiss and Koch: *Expositio libri Exodi, Sermones et lectiones. super Ecclesiastici ExpositW. libri Sapientiae* (LW 2, Stuttgart, 1954).

[14] Ed. Karl Christ and Koch, *Magistri Echardi Expositio sancti evangelii secundum Iohannem* (LW S, Stuttgart, 1986).

the master's most mature work.'[15] There survive the introduction only to a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*,[16] aIJ.d the *Parisi,an Questions,* textually perhaps Eckhart's most carefully prepared work,[17] a sermon for St. Augustine's Day preachedin Paris,[18] and a treatise on the Our Father.[19] Finally, mention must be made of the grand design, elaborately planned but never executed apart from the prologue and the opening proposition, ' Being is God . . .'-for the work called the *OJ>US tnpartitum,* the 'Threefold Work'.[20] Koch writes of this project: '... we probably shall not be far out if we attribute it to the mature man who at the height of his powers is setting in order the riches.of the knowledge he has gained . . . we can still form a picture of this work, which was to have contained more than a thousand *sententiae* in fourteen treatises, because we know the models which Eckhart had in mind when he formed his plan. Such philosophical works, consisting of *pr<Ypositiones* and their elucidations, *commenta,* are characteristic of the literature influenced by Neoplatonism. Their first exemplar is Proclus's *Elements of Theology,* which William of Moerbecke translated into La;tin in 1268 with the title *Elementatio theologica'* Whether Eckhart knew the *Elements* at first hand is immaterial; we may be sure that he knew the genre.

The Scrutiny of the Works

These, then, are some of the works by which he was known, and which the archbishop's commissioners scrutinized. We must now say something about how and to what ends such

[15] *Kleine Schriften* 1

[16] Ed. Koch, *Fratris Echardi Principium, coUatio in libros sententiarum* (LW 5, Stuttgart, 1954).

[17] Ed. Bernard Geyer, *Magistri Echardi Quaestianes Parisien.seauna cum Quaeatiane Magistri Consalvi* (LW 5). Translated with an introduction and notes, A. Maurer: *Master Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologuea* (Toronto, 1974).

[18] Ed. Geyer, *Magistri Echardi Sermo die b. Augustini Parisius habitus* (LW 5).

[19] Ed. Erich Seeberg, *Magistri Echardi Tractatus. super oratiane dominica* (LW 5).

[20] Ed. Weiss (LW 1),
nLW S xv,

scrutinies were achieved. The method had become standard since the proceedings against Abelard a century before.[22] Sentences, *articuli,* which seemed suspect to the scrutineers were drawn up in lists, *rotuli,* which the commissioners proceeded to examine. In cases such as Abelard's, the subject was given no opportunity of a verbal defense; what was genuinely inquisitorial in Eckhart's case is that he was required to furnish written comments on the articles; we know that he was confronted with four, and there may have been five such lists. In the 'Vindicatory Document,' and in his solemn profession of his freedom from all taint of heresy he asserted that he was easily able to demonstrate that all he had taught was in harmony with the mind of the Church. When he .successfully appealed from the archbishop's jurisdiction to the Holy See, it would appear that the commissioners' massive dos.sier went to Avignon; and it is beyond doubt that there many of its articles were suppressed, and the remainder reduced to a manageable size. But it is obvious that in such proceedings the lists would .show progressively less of the accused's entire work and of the spirit in which the suspect articles had been advanced; in Eckhart's case we have a remarkable witness to how unsatisfactory the whole inquisitorial method was in the person of James Fournier, the Cistercian bishop, long active against heretics, called to Avignon as theological expert to John XXII, and in 1327 made a cardinal. He was entrusted with presenting to the pope the commissioners' :findings, and his own, on Eckhart's theology; and under John XXII he was similarly active in the cases of Michael of Cesena, William of Ockham, Peter John Olivi and Durandus of Saint-Pour\!ain. We know from his reminiscences of this last case how conscious he was of the defects of the system he was using.

Dealing with Durandus, he was in a position of exceptional difficulty, for the bishop was one of many who were saying and

••See Koch, *Klein1J Schriften* I 824 e. s., and his important essay, 'Philosophische und theologische Irrtumslisten von 1270-1829,' repr. fr. *Melanges Mandonnet* 1980, in *Kleine Schriften !t* 428-450.

writing that John XXII's views on withholding the whole of the Beatific Vision from the Blessed until the Last Day were untenable; and these criticisms of the pope's theological ineptitude were being seized on with joy by such men as William of Ockham, who had gone into schism with Louis of Bavaria, and who were seeking to convict the pope of heresy, which would automatically depose him and nullify his actions against them. In several places Ockham tells us that he and Eckhart were together in Avignon, awaiting sentence, before he fled the city and joined Michael of Cesena under the emperor's protection; and in his *Di<ilogus* he writes:

> . . . and that no-one ought from now on to assert that 'God's creatures are not a pure nothingness.' [23] That all such absurdities and very many others like them follow . . . is proved, because all those I have mentioned and others similar, most absurd, were advanced by a certain master of theology of the Order of Preachers called Aycardus, a German . . . who afterwards came to Avignon and, when interrogators had been assigned to him, did not deny that he had taught and preached them. He was not condemned for them, nor were these and other such assertions condemned, but they were handed over to the cardinals, so that they might deliberate whether they were to be counted heretical.M

This statement lacks any semblance of candor. Writing after 1334, Ockham makes no mention of the condemnation, *In agro dorninico,* or of the statement there that on his deathbed, before sentence had been pronounced, Eckhart had willingly retracted whatever in his teachings might be found heresy; everything must be subordinated to Ockham's task of proving the pope a heretic.

As successor to John XXII, Fournier, now Benedict XII, was able to find a just and eirenic solution, worded with extreme tact, to the Vision-controversy in *BenedicfJusDeus,* of 1336; and it must have been because he perceived what future importance any account of his part in such controversies would

••See *In agro dominico (Denzinger-Schonmetzer* 950-980), axt. 976.

"'Dialogua **ill** 1, 'De potestate papae et cleri,' in Melchior Goldast, *Monarchia s. Romani imperii* (Hanover, 1612), fl 909.

have that he caused a dossier on them all to be prepared. This was catalogued in two inventories of later Avignon popes, but since then has disappeared; all that we now know of it is what is quoted by the Augustinian John of Basel. 'Hiltalinger,' who died in 1392 as bishop of Lombez, in his Commentary on the Sentences and his *Decem responsiones.*[25] These quotations are enough to show us the care with which the dossier was prepared, and how invaluable a find it would be if the original dossier were ever to be rediscovered.

Elsewhere, Fournier recounts how he hesitated to pronounce on eleven articles submitted to him from the writings of Durandus: **'I** made many excuses to the pope (John XXII), and gave many reasons why it seemed to me neither useful nor expedient for me to write anything upon these questions, especially because I did not have a copy of the bishop's writings from which these questions had been formulated '-that is, he had seen only a list or lists of the articles-' but nonetheless I was not able to persuade the pope to withdraw the order he had laid upon me. He wished and firmly ordered me to write my opinion.'[26] We do not know if Fournier made similar moves in other cases; if he did in that of Eckhart, they led to nothing; he appears to confine himself to the articles and to Eckhart' s replies. To quote one, taken by Fournier or by intermediaries from the Cologne dossier, we may guess, will sufficiently indicate with what care the work was done. Here is Eckhart's written defense of what appear, in the final judgment of his case, *In agro dominioo,* as articles 17 ('A good man is the only-begotten son of God') and 18 ('A noble man is the only-begotten son of God whom God the Father eternally begot '):

It must be said of these two articles that according to the deceived intellect and the imagination it is wholly foolish and erroneous to suggest that a good and noble man is that very only-begotten Son in the Trinity. But what the intellect and the imagination do not know and what is true is that the very same only-begotten Son

[25] I am indebted, as was Koch, to the generous information of Damasus Trapp, 0. S. A., who is preparing an edition of *Decem resp<mSiones* for publication.

[26] Koch, *Kleine Schriften* 1 839 n. !M7.

in the blessed Trinity is there where all faithful sons of God are by adoption, for there is not one Son in the Trinity and another-who, I do not know-there where we are sons of God and coheirs with the Son ... To think otherwise appears vulgar ignorance. Nor is God divided in us, being ·the true God who is indeed one in all things. So Eckhart. [27]

It must be pointed out that *In agro d<>minico* does not condemn articles 17 and 18 as heretical; it does this only for the first fifteen articles, and, as we have seen, the last two it does condemn, but accepts that Eckhart never taught them. The rest, including 17 and 18, it deplores for their rash language and the difficulty .with which they can be reconciled with sound doctrine, but it does no more.

Eckhart's Reply to His Critics

With regard to this reply of Eckhart's, the difficulties surely are not so great. Karl Kertz, in his learned and subtle exposition of Eckhart's teaching on 'the birth of the Word in the soul,' [28] recognized and partly investigated what should be decisive in determining whether teaching that ' man is the only-begotten son of God• is true or :false: does this only-begotten son of God share in the Hypostatic Union or not? In this one instance, when Eckhart writes of the identity of the second person of the Trinity, and of all the :faithful sons of God who are in the Trinity ' by adoption,' this cannot, I believe, be interpreted other than as teaching that God's creatures do not share in the Hypostatic Union. Of the many urgent tasks awaiting Eckhart theologians, none is perhaps more needed than a patient and thorough examination of what he taught upon this topic. We do not know, but we may guess that Fournier perceived that this defense 0:f Eckhart's was theologically admissible, and that this is why articles 17 and 18, among others, were deplored but not condemned.

How deplorable are Eckhart's views and language? Much

••*Ibid.* 1 SS7.

98 · Meister Eckhart's Teaching on the Birth of the Divine Word in the Soul ' *(Tradition* 15, 1959, S27-S6S).

has always depended, I think, on the willingness of his auditors and readers to take scandal. If one has the misfortune (this was the case with me) to make one's first acquaintance with him through *In agro dominico,* one of two reactions will be most probable. Either one will surmise (as I for long did) that this was a field in which an enemy came to sow tares, that Eckhart never said what he was accused of, or one will take up Ockham's attitude (though not, let us hope, with his impure motives), and write Eckhart off as a purveyor of insidious and irrational falsehoods. The first reaction has not been possible since Laurent's careful identification of each article from *In agro dominico* with a place or places in the genuine works, where Eckhart did write what he was alleged to have written.[29] What is now needed, and is being done, step by step, is to do for him what Fournier wished to achieve for Durandus, to restore the *scandala* to their contexts and reflect whether they are, after all, so scandalous.

Let me now briefly examine only two places to illustrate what I am asking for; in one Eckhart may seem to be teaching 'false deification'; in the other false quietism. The first is from *The Book of Divine Consolation,* where, it is true, Eckhart writes: 'For that which he loves is God the Father unbegotten, and he who loves '-that is, every just soul-' is God the Son begotten,'[30] which provides material for the deplored article 17; but Eckhart could well have replied to his accusers that if they would read the whole of the *Book* they could see for themselves that earlier he had written:

> St. John says in his gospel: 'To them all was given power and might to become the sons of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of man's will but of God, and from God alone' ... and yet, because they '-that is, the will and the highest powers of the soul-' are not God, but were created in the soul and with the soul, they must be stripped of themselves and transformed into God alone and born in God and from God, so that God alone

[29] M. H. Laurent, 'Autour du de maitre Eckhart. Les documents des archives Vaticanes' *(Divus Thomas.* 89, 1986, 881-848, 480-447).

[30] DW 5 44; Clark and Skinner, 185.

may be their father, for in this way they are also God's sons and God's only-begotten. [81]

This passage clearly distinguishes between true and false deification, and adduces, as must all who teach true deification, the prologue to John's Gospel as one of the key texts.

Let us consider a second place, and its applicability to others where Eckhart seems to be teaching a false quietism. The *scandalum* alleged against him and condemned as article 8 of *In agro dominico* is: 'That God is honoured in those men who do not desire anything, not honour or profit or inward devotion, not sanctity or rewards or the kingdom of heaven, but have renounced all these .. .'; and this has been identified as occurring in the German Sermon 6, 'Iusti vivent in aeternum ':

> Who are they who honour God? Those who have wholly gone out of themselves, and who do not seek their own in anything, however small, whatever it may be ... not profit or honour or comfort or pleasure . . . not devotion or holiness or reward or the kingdom of heaven, but they have renounced all this. [82]

But compare this with another German sermon. 'Modicum et iam non videbitis me'; [33] where Eckhart is saying, on the same topic, something very different:

> For whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, nature in her innermost recesses secretly seeks and aims at God. No thirsty man ever longed to find someone to give him a drink unless he longed for God, and unless there were something of God in it. Nature aims at neither eating nor drinking, neither clothing nor comfort, nor at anything else at all, unless God is in it. She seeks secretly, struggling and gnawing always, to the end that she may find God in it. [84]

If we put these two places in conjunction, we see, again, how easily Eckhart could have demonstrated that 'Iusti vivent' is to be read in the light of 'Modicum et iam,' and that those who do so will find that the whole of his mind is:

[81] DW 5 10-11; Clark and Skinner, 111.

[82] DW 1 100.

[83] Ed. Quint, DW 8,

[84] J. M. Clark: *Meister Eckhart: an Introduction to the Study of his Works with an Anthology of his Sermons* (London, 1957), 179; DW S 17!!.

That God is honoured in those men who do not desire anything, not honours or profit or inward devotion ... but who seek secretly, struggling and gnawing always, to the end that they may find God.

Such a teaching is free of false quietism. In so interpreting him one may be accused of explaining Eckhart away, but one is rather performing an essential task in synthesizing the utterances of a man who was by temperament inclined to let his emotions of the moment, and, it may be, the varying perceptivities of different audiences stress different but not incompatible elements in his thought.

We may ask why he did not show himself more able in his own defense. The answer seems to lie alike in his qualities and in his defects. He seems at no time, at Cologne or at Avignon, to have recognized that he was in any position of danger. All his writings, and all that we are told of his conduct, convey to us the impression of a man of great probity, *integer vitae scelerisque purus,* quite unafraid of what others could do to him. He expected to be vindicated, and so, it seems, did those of the German provinces who either accompanied him to Avignon or joined him there. Indeed, the chief motive of his former teaching assistant, Nicholas of Strassburg, who had now become papal visitator for Saxonia,[35] in intervening was to ensure that the renegade Dominican Hermann ' de Summo,' who seems to have acted throughout as Eckhart's enemy,[36] was suitably punished. The vice-procurator Gerhard of Podanh, commending to the pope Henry of Cigno, the provincial of Teutonia, and three of his lectors, then in Avignon, as witnesses to Hermann's misdeeds, writes of Eckhart as 'one of whose orthodoxy and sanctity of life not even [Hermann J or anyone else would doubt, did they know his way of life '.[37]

In his " Vindicatory Document," couched, it must be said, in terms of charitable mildness, Eckhart does nonetheless implicitly disparage the theology and Scriptural knowledge of his

••*Kleine Schriften* 1 816.
•• *Ibid.* 1 828-880.
M *Ibid.* 1 884.

adversaries, for so he regarded them, rather than as his judges; and he shows an extrovert's confidence in his ability to win them over. But Koch plainly considers his conduct of his own defense inept; and he calls the description of the scene, on 13 February, 1327, in the Dominican church in Cologne, when Eckhart preached and made a solemn public protestation of his detestation of heresy and of every moral lapse, as well as of his willingness to retract anything in his teaching which could be proved heretical, and went on to offer explanations of three particular points of misunderstanding,' the most painful document of the whole process.' [38]

It was a flight into the open which could not have a good effect anywhere. The judges only gathered that he was not ready to recognize and revoke the errors they ascribed to him; the people could not understand the declaration '-which was in Latin-' despite the [German] commentary; and Eckhart's friends must have asked why suddenly such a step was necessary. The particular explanations of the three misunderstood points also seem to have been badly prepared. 'If he had preached that his little finger had created everything' (which, incidentally, disappears from *In agro dominico),* 'he meant by that the finger of the Child Jesus.' That is-to put it mildly-a childish defense, and one does not know for whom it is intended. The other two points concern what in the soul is uncreated. The first explanation repeats what he has said elsewhere: if the soul were all intellect, it would be uncreated. Did he really expect the faithful there in the church to understand that? The second is comprehensible, in so far as he rejects that the soul is cobbled together out of the created and the uncreated. But what he then adds about the uncreated is without sense. *Es ist ein schlechter Abgesang, mit dem der Meister die Kolner Buhne verliess.39*

What followed is well known. He went to Avignon, where Ockham saw him. Probably he lived there under the same conditions as the English Franciscan, not under duress, but not free to depart from the Curia until sentence had been pronounced. [40] We have seen that the process was set in motion, and that the

[38] *Ibid.* 1 882.
[39] *Ibid.* 1 882.
[40] *I"tJid,* 1 845,

commissioners sent the papers to Cardinal Fournier; but on 30 April, 1328, when John XXII wrote to the archbishop of Cologne, assuring him that the case was proceeding well and that a sentence would be given, he referred to Eckhart as now

When, on 27 March, 1329, the constitution *In agro dominico* was at last promulgated, it contained the information that on his deathbed he made a declaration, similar to that of two years previous in Cologne, faith and of willingness to retract what could be proved heretical. It would seem that not even the prospect of departure from this life could move him from the position which he had maintained against such forces.

We may think that Koch is somewhat too sanguine in writing that ' the Church saw Eckhart for what he truly was, her faithful son,' [42] but when he goes on to observe that the document *In agro dominico* condemns some of his teachings but not the teacher, there is justice in what he says. Contrast this constitution with others such. Clement V's *Ad nostrum* (1312) writes of the Beghards and Beguines: 'We condemn and reprobate utterly this sect with its aforesaid errors;' [48] and in 1327, John XXII had written in *Licet iuxta doctrinam* of the teachings of Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun: 'We declare the aforesaid articles to be heretical, and ·the aforesaid Marsilius and John to be heretics, indeed, heresiarchs, open and notorious.' [0] By no means does one wish to suggest that the pope was leaving Eckhart for history to judge; this more clement treatment probably shows that he (and the archbishop of Cologne) had not been given the full support of Cardinal Fournier. But it can be shown that in the next hundred years or so there were to be men of learning and sanctity who did not consider that the last word had been said with *In agro dominico.*

Probably the first of these was Henry Suso., who, along with John Tauler, must have studied under Eckhart. His *Little*

"*Ibid.* 1 828, 845.
[42] *Ibid.* 1 207.
•• Denzinger-Schonmetzer, art. 899.
.. *Ibid.*, art. 946.

Book of Truth was certainly issued after Eckhart's death, for he is recognizably the ' sublime master' who is spoken of as no longer alive. In its sixth chapter, the Boethian dialogue takes place between the Disciple, who is Suso himself, and " das namenlose Wilde," " the nameless Wild Thing," " subtle in his words, but unskilled in his works, and who abounded in rhetorical verbiage." [45] The Wild Thing says that his wisdom has led him to complete liberty, which is' when a man lives according to his own choice, without opposition, without any look before or after.' The Disciple calls this antinomianism 'evil and deficient,' and urges the importance of ordered philosophical thinking. The Wild Thing retorts: **'I** have heard that there was a sublime master, and that he denied all distinctions.' [46] The Disciple replies with Suso's statement of what he understands of Eckhart's doctrine of being and essence: **'I** understand it thus: in truth there is nothing that can be separated from the simple Being, because he gives being to all beings, but there is a distinction in the sense that the divine Being is not the being of a stone, nor is the being of a stone the divine Being, and no creature is identical with another. Hence the theologians maintain that, properly speaking, this distinction is not in God but from God. And he (Eckhart) speaks concerning the Book of Wisdom: " Just as there is nothing more inward than God, in the same way there is nothing more distinct ".' [47] Here Suso is demonstrating, as plainly as he thinks expedient, that for him Eckhart's teachings are still open to discussion.

[45] Das namcnlose Wilde " is usually translated as " nameless wild man; " it was Romana Guarnieri in "TI movimento del Libero Spiritu," *Archivio ItaHano pM' la Sf!Oria della Piew,* 4, *1965,* 351-708, 432, who pointed out that the personification is neuter, not masculine, and who adduced Margaret Porette's remark in *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* "ou est telle Ame sans ll'om;" the claim to deification in this attribute of namelessness will be evident to all familiar with pseudo-Dionysius.

[46] J. M. Clark, trans.: *Henry Suao,: Little Book of Eternal Wisdom and Little Book of Truth* (London, 1953), 201-203. The 'denial of all distinctions' alludes to *In agro dominico,* art. 10: 'We arc wholly transformed and converted into God ... By the living God it is true that there is no distinction.'

[47] Clark, *Little Book,* 203.

His other Dominican pupil, Tauler, is yet more explicit. In a sermon for the Eve of Palm Sunday he deals with John 17:21: 'I pray that they may be one as we are one,' interpreting the text in terms of unitive prayer and the contemplative effort, and he says: 'Those who have grown in natural wisdom, who have been trained in mortal activities, who have lived in their senses, cannot come here; no, they cannot come so far. Moreover, one dear teacher taught you and spoke on this subject, and you did not understand him. He spoke from the point of view of eternity, and you understood him from the point of view of time. My dear children, if I have said too much for you, it is certainly not too much for God; but nonetheless I beg you to forgive me, and if there is need I am willing to correct my words.'[48] The implications of this are clear: Tauler considers that the 'dear teacher' was unjustly condemned, because he was not understood. Discreetly, he imputes the blame, not to the professional theologians who examined him, but to his present audience (who, be it remembered, may have been Dominicans, nuns or friars, who had indeed heard Eckhart preach). Tauler is well aware that he is transgressing his Order's enactments, passed in the last year of Eckhart's life, manifestly occasioned by the odium he had incurred, against the discussion in vernacular sermons of theological subtleties,[49] and he knowingly 'allies himself with Eckhart in professing his willingness to retract his words if they be found unorthodox.

As our third instance of those who did not regard *In agro dominico* as binding, there is what Koch described as Thomas Kaeppeli's 'sensational discovery,' in 1960, that MS Basel B VI 16, containing some six hundred excerpts from Eckhart's works, evidently derives from an original made in the Cologne Dominican house after the promulgation of *In agro dominico*, notations from which are incorporated into it.[50] Significantly, the manu-

[48] F. Vetter, ed.: *Die Predigtoo Taulers* (Berlin, 1910), 69.

[49] B. M. Reichert, ed.: *Acta capitulorum generalium ordinis praedicatorum* [!] *(Monumenta ordinis fratrum praedicatorum historica* 4, 1899), 180.

[50] 'Meister Eckharts Weiterwirken in deutsch-niederlandischen Raum im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert' *(La mystique rhenane,* 1963, 133-156, repr. *Kleine Schriften* I 429-455), 436.

script was owned by the Basel Carthusians, whose Order has been shown to have been so active in the dissemination of such texts as Margaret Porette's *Mirror of Simple* Souls.[51]

Finally, let us consider the instance of Nicholas of Cusa. When in the end he condescended to acknowledge John Wenck's *De ignota litteratura,*[52] he wrote in his *A]>Ologia doctae ignorantiae:*[58]

I [the fictional disciple] did not wish to leave undiscussed what the adversary [Wenck] had alleged against Meister Eckhart, and I asked the teacher [Nicholas] if he had heard anything of him. He replied that he had seen in libraries many of his commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, numerous sermons and disputed questions, and also a number of articles extracted from his Commentary on St. John, annotated and refuted by others, and also at Master John Guldenschaf's in Mainz a short writing of his in which he replies to those who had sought to reprehend him, explaining himself and demonstrating what his adversaries had not understood. But the teacher said that he had never read that he considered the creature to be identical with the Creator. He praised his gifts and his zeal; but he would have preferred his books to be removed from public places, because the people are not able to understand these matters, with which he often dealt differently from other teachers, even though intelligent men will find in them many subtle and profitable things.[54]

We may think that here we are listening, for the first time, to the voice of informed common sense. Evidently Nicholas shares the point of view of Suso, Tauler and the Cologne Dominicans; for him too, Eckhart is no heretic. But, on the other hand, he will not go so far in his praise; intelligent men will find in Eckhart's writings 'many subtle and profitable things,' but that does not make him a ' sublime master,' for Nicholas, a ' dear

[51] See M. G. Sargent: 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some late medieval spiritual Writings' *(Journal, of Ecclesiastical,History* 27, 1976, 225·240).

••Ed. E. Vansteenberghe: 'Le "De ignota litteratura" de Jean Wenck de Herrenberg contre Nicolas de Cuse ' *(Beitrage zur Gescki.ckte der Pkllo8opkie des Mittelalters: Texte und Untersuckungem* VII 6, 1910).

••Ed. R. Klibansky, Leipzig, 1982.

•• Klibansky, 24-25.

teacher ' telling of eternity. And, above aU, says Nicholas, keep his writings out of the hands of the uninstructed, who will not understand what he teaches, so wholly different from what they are accustomed to.

I quote Nicholas's opinion with such approbation chiefly because it coincides so closely with my own. Though I have no wish in any way to prejudice the continuing discussion, I think that I am justified in following him in hoping for caution. I set particular store by the opinions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which I have rehearsed, because they all come from men who were then concerned, as I today must be, with whether Eckhart taught the Catholic faith. It can be shown that it is the faith which he was teaching. I have attempted to demonstrate, in a very few instances, how, it seems to me, that conclusion is possible through a careful weighing of his words, even when they seem to contradict one another, until one arrives as near as may be at the totality of his thought on a given topic. That is a sounder method than isolating some striking dictum and interpreting it without reference to its context or to his other pronouncements, whether such interpretation be *ad pejorem* (as was that of his inquisitors) or *ad meliorem,* as is that of so many today who seek to claim him as a supporter of creeds and philosophies which can be wholly alien to his view of created human nature and its relations with its Creator. In every department of religious knowledge, and nowhere more than in our study of Eckhart, what is needed is not pejorism or meliorism, but respectable scientific method.

The search for other documents, such as the Fournier dossier, which we know to be missing, must continue. Since Denifle inaugurated modern Eckhart research, each such major discovery has led to fundamental reassessment of his thought, and no doubt many such still lie ahead of us. The entire archive must be edited and read in its original languages; especially when we are concerned with his German, it is not possible to translate a sentence (as I am very aware) without in some way interpreting it for the reader. Much more investigation

of all his possible sources, in any language available to him, is required; we still do not know what he may have owed to *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* or whether, to cite only one other possibility, he may have been a popularizer of Avicenna. A comparison of his fragmentary corpus with the rounded work of contemporary teachers as sympathetic as he to Platonism, such as Bonaventure, might serve to suggest to us much that he may have thought but left unwritten. It would be most desirable to evaluate his theological influence upon those who genuinely understood and esteemed the whole of his teaching; anything which could be done to present to us more objectively such men as Nicholas of Cusa would perform the same service for Eckhart.

It is my opinion that no final solution to Eckhart problems can be achieved. Whereas his readers tend to search his writings for formulas, he himself was concerned rather to offer us only his own perception of, and reflection on, a mystery. We may learn to follow him better, but he will not bring us to the end of the journey.

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ECKHART AND LUTHER: GERMAN MYSTICISM AND PROTESTANTISM

THERE IS A TEMPTATION today to minimize torical differences for the sake of ecumenical dialogue. There is also a temptation to become so fascinated with the internal logic of writings by creative thinkers like Eckhart and Luther that we forget that their meaning is also determined by the historical forces of the age in which they lived. To avoid such temptations we must bear in mind not only that Eckhart and Luther lived two centuries apart from each other, but also that they were schooled in different intellectual traditions and wrote in response to different historical crises. This is not to say that they do not have some striking similarities. They were both Thilringians and both were friars. The teaching of each was roundly condemned by the church. Each exercised a very formative influence on the German language. And each had a revolutionary impact on laity who were attracted to the egalitarian and anti-hierarchical strains in their theologies. Here, however, the similarity ends and the topic " Eckhart and Luther" becomes a door to many problems. There is, first of all, the sheer complexity of each man. Eckhart was both a careful Latin scholar and a daring vernacular preacher. His friends continue to see him as a misunderstood and falsely accused loyal son of the church, while his critics believe he was at least an unwitting theorist for heterodox religious movements. He is both praised as a brilliant Neoplatonist and Thomist and spurned as a second-rate scholastic and purveyor of heresy.[1] Luther is equally complex. A rebel and heretic condemned by the pope, he came to be rejected by many of his fellow Protestants as a reactionary who clung to too many

[1] On contemporary and modern assessments of Eckhart, see Ingeborg Degenhardt, *Studien zum Wandel des Eckhartbildes* (Leiden, 1967).

traditional teachings and practices.[2] On the topic before us Luther appears to be even more problematical than Eckhart, since, as a young theologian, he was enamoured with German mysticism, while in his later years he could associate mysticism with sectarian fanaticism.

Beyond the problem of identifying each man in his respective historical dress, there is the question of exactly what is compared when the two are finally brought together. We have no evidence that Luther ever had direct, conscious contact with the writings of Eckhart. He did unknowingly read and comment on several of Eckhart's sermons, which were interspersed in the collection of John Tauler's sermons which Luther annotated in 1516.[3] Luther may also have seen editions of Tauler to which sermons of Eckhart were appended. But Luther's knowledge of Eckhart and German mysticism came almost exclusively from sources other than Eckhart. Unless we are to pursue the topic " Eckhart and Luther " on a purely literary and theoretical level, it must be reshaped into the question of Luther's relation to the German mystical tradition as it was mediated to him by Eckhart's student and disciple John Tauler and by an anonymous mystical tract, twice edited by Luther, known as the *German Theology*.•

This raises the further issue of the role played by German mysticism in the formation of Protestant theology and religious practice apart from and even against Luther. This issue is forced upon us by the fact that it was not Luther and the Lutherans but their Anabaptist and Spiritualist opponents who embraced the German mystical tradition most enthusiastically and in its purest form.

• On Luther's Protestant critics, see Mark Edwards, *Luther and the Fake Brethren* (Stanford, 1975).

[8] See Ozment, "An Aid to Luther's Marginal Comments to Joh. Tauler's Sermons," *HThR* 63 (1970), 805-11.

• Alois Dempf depicts Tauler as a faithful mediator of Eckhartian concepts and language to Luther: *Meister Eckhart* (Ba.sel, 1960). See also my *Homo Spiritualis* (Leiden, 1969). A third channel of German mysticism was Luther's spiritual mentor Joh. von Staupitz. See David C. Steinmetz, *Misericordia* Dei: *The Theology of Joh. von Staupitz in its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden, 1968).

There are two final issues raised by the topic " Eckhart and J,uther." The first is that of Luther's relation to the medieval tradition in which he was trained as a student and which many hold to be the theological and philosophical counterpoint to mysticism-the nominalism of William of Ockham. The other issue is the revival of mystical theology among Lutherans in the second half of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Pietism became a significant force in Protestant churches. This last problem is especially interesting, not only because of pervasive Pietist interest in mysticism, but also because the orthodox Lutherans themselves developed a peculiar doctrine of mystical union that became the most prominent feature of Lutheran theology. We must ask whether there was a belated ascendancy of German mysticism within Lutheranism.

Luther and German Mystidism.

During what were perhaps Luther's most formative years, between 1516 and 1518, he expressed the highest praise for Tauler and the *Germa.n Theology.* In a letter to his friend, the electoral counsellor Georg Spalatin, Luther described Tauler's sermons as " pure and solid theology, like that of the ancients," and professed to know no contemporary work in either Latin or German that was more beneficial and in agreement with the gospel.[5] In his defense of the *95* Theses in 1518 Luther said he had found more genuine theology in Tauler than in all the scholastic theologians in all the universities.[6] In the same year he described the *German Theology,* the full text of which he also published, as an anticipation of the new Wittenberg theology, declaring that only the Bible and St. Augustine had taught him more about God, Christ, man, and all things.[7]

Given such positive statements by Luther on the German mystical tradition it is not surprising that scholars have in the past looked especially to this tradition for the medieval roots

[6] *Dr. M. Luthers Briefwechsd,* ed. E. L. Enders (Frankfurt a. M., 1884) I, 75.

• *D. Martin Luthers Werke,* Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1888 ff), I, 57; henceforth *WA.*

• *WA* I, 158, 378.

of Protestant theology. Eckhart and Tauler have been seen as opponents of works-righteousness and true forerunners of the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.[8] The *Catalogus Testium Veritatis* (1556) of Flacius Illyricus, which formed the core of the later *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559-74), the first Protestant history of the church, described Tauler as having rejected the concept of merit and taught that only trust and faith in God sufficed for salvation.[9] It has been argued that Tauler and the *German Theology* were the single most important sources of Luther's attack on medieval penitential practice-this because of their alleged Augustinian doctrine of human sinfulness and man's utter dependence on grace for salvation.[10] German mysticism has also been seen as Luther's ally against the inexperienced faith (the so-called "ecclesiastical positivism") and semi-Pelagian teaching of the Ockhamist theology in which he was trained.[11]

Most scholars today question such a positive view of the relationship between German mysticism and the Protestant Reformation. They are impressed by evidence that Luther already had the essential elements of his new theology well before he read Tauler and discovered the *German Theology*. Scholars also appreciate the genuine Catholic character of German mysticism, including many of the works of Eckhart, whose condemnation they trace more to the political motives of his enemies than to any doctrinal errors in his theology.[12]

[8] Carl Ullmann, *Reformatoren vor der Reformation* I-II (Gotha, 1866); Wilhelm Prcger, *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter* I-III (Leipzig, 1874-98). Cf. also Degenhardt, 144-5, 257.

[9] Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Catalogus Testium Veritatis* (Argentinae, 1562), 507.

[10] A. V. Miiller, *Luther and Tauler auf ihrem theologischen Zusammenhang neu untersucht* (Bern, 1918), 25, 168.

[11] Bengt Hagglund, "Luther's Doctrine of Justification in Late Medieval Theology," *Lutheran World* 8 (1961), 25-46; Reinhold Seeberg, *Die religiosen Grundgedanken des jungen Luther und ihr Verhiiltnis zu dem Ockhamismus und der deutschen Mystik* (Berlin, 1981).

[12] See esp. Otto Scheel, " Taulers Mystik und Luthers rcformatorische Entdeckung," *Festgabe fur Julius Kaftan* (Tiibingen, 1920), 198. On Eckhart's orthodoxy, see Degenhardt, 75, 82-8, 188-4.

Some argue that mysticism and Protestantism are fundamentally incompatible.[18]

The study of Eckhart and Luther by the Heidelberg Protestant historian Heinrich Bornkamm, written as a series of articles in the mid-1930s, remains a respected summary of the larger issues at stake in a comparison of German mysticism and Protestantism. Bornkamm cited ten fundamental differences between the theology of Eckhart and that of Luther.

1. Luther was less bold and less speculative than Eckhart, careful to confine himself to Scripture and biblical terms when he spoke about God.

2. Luther believed that the understanding of divine things (religious *intelleotus)* was a special insight conveyed only by the gift of faith and not something also latent in an inner ground of the soul, as Eckhart taught.

3. Luther did not believe that man, in his most noble part, was like God. Contrary to Eckhart, Luther found no still point in the depths of the soul which might serve as a medium for divine purity.

4. Luther conceived man as a whole being, while Eckhart spoke of him on two levels, depending upon whether he dealt with him in terms of his higher nature or supernatural part, or as a purely natural creature.[14]

5. Luther also saw man's union with God very differently, according to Bornkamm. For Eckhart, mystical union was an understanding in which all sense of distinction between God

[18] Basically the position of the nineteenth-century Protestant church historians, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and Karl Holl.

[14] Eckhart writes: "Eine Kraft ist in der Seele, von der ich schon ofter gesprochen habe,-wiire die Seele ganz so, so ware sie ungeschaffen und unerschaffbar. Nun ist dem nicht so. Mit dem iibrigen Tell ihres Scins hat sie ein Absehen auf und ein Anhangen an die Zeit, und damit beriihrt sie die Geschaffenheit und ist geschaffen-es ist die Vernunft: dieser Kraft ist nichts fem noch draussen. Was jenseits des Meeres ist oder iiber tausend Mellen entfemt, das ist ihr ebenso eigentlich bekannt und gegenwiirtig wie diese Stiitte, an der ich stehe. Diese Kraft ist eine Jungfrau und folgt dem Lamm nach, wohin es auch geht. Diese Kraft nimmt Gott ganz entblosst in seinem wesenhaften Sein: sie ist eins in der Einheit, nicht gleich in der Gleichheit." *Die deutachen Werke* J, *Meister Eckhart/! Predigten,* ed. by Josef Quint (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1936), 48!!

and man was lost. As Eckhart put it, we are to be neither "like " God nor " merely united " with him; we are to be joined with him " in one single one (*ein einic ein)* ." [15] For Luther, to be one with God meant to conform oneself to God's judgment of all men as sinful liars and declaration of himself (God) as alone righteous and truthful. Union with God, in other words, was a new understanding of the distance between God and man, not its complete overcoming.

6. For Luther, such union was not the result of a practiced ascetic art or final state of contemplative exercise, as Eckhart taught the nuns to whom he preached. It was rather an experience attained by all who simply believed in Christ; it was the very content of faith.

7. Although Eckhart criticized external works and religiosity, he still believed that the inner work of humility, when performed in quest of mystical union, was meritorious. In this belief he remains vulnerable to Protestant criticism of works-righteousness, which rejects internal as well as external works as meritorious of grace and salvation.

8. Eckhart did not share Luther's view that worldly vocations were professions into which people were as divinely called as they were into clerical ranks. Despite the egalitarian strains in his theology, Eckhart still believed in a spiritual superiority of the clergy over the laity.

[10] Eckhart comments on the transition from " likeness " to " unity " to " oneness " : " Also spriche ich nu von gelichniisse unt von der minne hitze; wan nach dem, daz ez dem andern gelicher ist, dar zuo unt dar nach jaget ez me unt ist snellcr unt ist ime sin louf siiezer unt wunneclicher, unt ie me ez verrer kumet von ime selber unde von allem dem, daz jenez niht ist, der nach wirt ez gelicher dem, daz ez jaget, dar zuo cz ilet. Unt wan gelichniisse fliuzet von dem einen unt ziuhet unt locket von der kraft unt in der kraft des einen, dar umbe gestillet noch beniieget niht nuch dem., daz da ziuhct, noch dem, daz gezogen wirt, unz daz sie in ein vereinet werdent. Unt dar umbe so sprichet unser herre in dem propheten Isaias unt meinet, daz kein hoehi, enkein nidri noch gelichniisse, kein fride der minne geniieget mir niht, unz daz ich selbe in minem sune erschine und ich selbe in der minne des heiligen geistes enbrant und cntziindet wirde. Unser herre Jesus Kristus der bat sinen vater, daz wir mit ime unt in ime ein wiirden, unt niht alleine vereinet, mer: ein einic ein." *Das. Buch der gottlichen Trostung in Deutsche Mystiker des 14. Jahrhunderts* II: *Meister Eckhart,* ed. by Franz Pfeiffer (Leipzig, 1857), 481. 1-17. See *ibid.,* 284. 11-22.

9. The church, its sacraments, and its doctrines held a less prominent place in the divine economy for Eckhart than they did for Luther. For Eckhart, they were external aids or provocations for the individual's retreat into the depths of his soul, where, Eckhart believed, the inner word dwelt and the spark of the soul *(das Funkle'in)* served as the sufficient medium for the Holy Spirit. Luther, in contrast, did not believe in the existence of such internal resources; the church, Scripture, and preaching were absolutely essential media without which the Spirit and true doctrine could not be present in the believer.

10. Finally, Luther did not share the mystic's disdain for the world as something unreal and to be given up. The world presented the believer with a special religious task, and in this sense, Bornkamm concluded, perhaps unfairly to Eckhart, " the world was more filled with God for Luther than for Eckhart." [16]

Many of these differences sketched by Bornkamm can also be documented in a comparison of Luther's theology with that of Tauler and the *German Theology,* who continue in a faithful way the Eckhartian tradition. [17] Despite his high praise for both, Luther showed no noteworthy interest in their mystical anthropology, nor did he embrace their view of man's union with God as a true deification *(vergottung).* In what I have found to be a very striking marginal comment on one of Tauler's sermons Luther substituted the word "faith " for what Tauler called the "spark of the soul" or man's highest part, so that faith, not a special quality of the soul, was seen to be that which made man a spiritual being.[18] Luther also described faith as the agent of a marriage between Christ and the soul; this occurs in the famous " happy exchange " *(froh-*

[16] *Eckhart und Luther* (Stuttgart, 1986). For a comparison of Luther with Tauler and the *German Theology* on many of these same points, see my *Homo Spiritualis* and *Mysticism and Dissent* (New Haven, 1978), ch. 2.

[17] Cf. Gosta Wrede, *Unio Mystica: ProblemeJ der Erfahrung bei Joh. Tauler* (Uppsala, 1974).

[18] *WA* 9, 99.86.

liche Wechsel) passage in his treatise on the *Freedom of the Christian* (1520). When faith comes between Christ and the believer, he wrote, they are united as a bride with her bridegroom; the soul is endowed with Christ's eternal righteousness, life, and salvation, while Christ takes upon himself the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's.[111] This passage deeply shocked Luther's Thomist critic, the Cologne theologian Jacob von Hochstraten, who protested that the soul could never be one with God on the basis of faith alone, since faith left the believer still at a distance from God; it was only as the soul was purified and likened to God by love that it could expect to become one with him.[20]

We can see in this famous passage from the *Freedom of the Christian* how Luther could remain worlds apart from traditional mystical teaching even when he borrowed mystical concepts and language most directly. When he later spoke of the believer's "deification" by Christ, or the Spirit's dwelling "substantially" in the believer, or declared God, Christ, and the believer to be "one thing,"[21] he was simply expressing the peculiar Protestant teaching that, through faith, the believer

[19] *WA* 6, 26 *Martin Luther: Three Treatises* (Philadelphia, 1960), 286-87.

[20] See Ozment, "Homo Viator: Luther and Late Medieval Theology," *HThr* (1969), 275-87; also in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. S. Ozment (Chicago, 1971). Joh. Von Walter comments on this famous passage: "Das Bild wird des mystischen Sinne vollstiindig entkleidet und zu einem Gleichnis der zugerechneten Gerechtigkeit." *Mystik und Rechtfertigkeit beim jungen Luther* (Giitersloh, 1937), 28. Comments Werner Elert on the same passage: "lnniger als <lurch <las Gleichnis des brautlichen Verhaltnisses zwischen Christus und dem Glaubenden nicht ausdriicken. Es ist klar <lass es ihm nur <lurch Glauben und imputierte Gerechtigkeit zustande kommt-das ist der wesentliche und bleibenden Unterschied von der Mystik Bernhards." *Morphologie des Luthertums* I: *The<>· logie und Weltanschauung des Luthertums hauptsachlich im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1931), 150.

[21] " Gott Christum seinem lieben son ausschuttet uber uns und sich inn uns geust und uns inn sich zeucht, <las er gautz und gar vcrmenschet wird und wir gantz und gar vergottet werden… und alles mit einander ein ding ist, Gott, Christus, und du." *WA* 20, 229.30; 230.10. "Habitat ergo verus Spiritus non tantum per dona, sed quoad substantiam suam." *WA* 40 II, 421.37. Cited and discussed by Elert, *Morphologie* I, 150. See also on this subject, Erich Vogelsang, "Die Unio Mystica bei Luther," *ARG* 85 (1939), 63-80.

becomes perfectly one with what he believes, despite his continuing great distance from it. As one *believes,* so one *has* and so one *is.*

H there are so many fundamental differences between Luther and the German mystical tradition, why did the young Luther praise it so highly? Some believe he simply misperceived the true nature of mysticism until its popularity among Protestant radicals in the 1520s opened his eyes; they argue that it was a "productive misunderstanding." [22] That, I believe, is a questionable interpretation. Luther's interest in German mysticism was both genuine and well-informed. But the important point is that he was never enamoured with its most distinctive mystical teachings. His interest lay rather in features of German mysticism which, while prominent, were not distinctively mystical at all.

First, Luther was attracted to the non-scholastic method and psychological treatment of the religious life which he found in both German and Latin mysticism. [23] Tauler and the *German Theology* dramatically portrayed passivity, suffering, and self-denial as essential conditions of any relationship with God. This ran parallel to Luther's own description of the role of humility, temptation, and self-accusation in religious life during his first lectures on the Psalms, between 1513 and 1515. Luther actually came to prefer the German to the Dionysian mystical tradition because of the former's recommendation of suffering and self-denial. It was in criticism of Dionysian speculation on the divine names and its involved quest for the hidden God that Luther made the famous complaint: "One becomes a theologian by dying and being damned, not by understanding, reading, and speculating." [24] German mysticism here contributed to the formation of what came to be known as Luther's "theology of the cross."

[22] See Degenhardt, 183-4; Artur Riihl, *Der Ein'ftuss der Mystik auf Denken und Entwicklung des jungen Luthers* (Oberhessen, 1960), 110; cf. Bernd Moeller, "Tauler und Luther" in *La mystique Rhenane: Colloque de Strasbourg 16-19 Mai 1961* (Paris, 1968).

[23] Riihl, 112-14, 182-88; Moeller, 159.

[24] *Operatirmesin Psalmos* (1519-20), *WA 5,* 168.

Secondly, Luther was impressed, especially after 1517, by the fact that Tauler's sermons and the *German Theology* were vernacular German works and not written in Latin. He saw them as precedents for his own "German" theology and appealed to these works to answer the charge against himself of doctrinal innovation. In the preface to the 1518 edition of the *German Theology,* written as he was coming under serious official scrutiny, Luther twice insisted that his Wittenberg theology, like the *German Theology,* was ancient and not "new" theology.[25]

Finally, Luther considered German mysticism an ally against the Ockhamist teaching that grace could be earned by those who did the best that was in them.[26] Mystical teaching about passivity and self-denial was perceived as opposing this Ockhamist doctrine. At the same time, however, Luther recognized that the high anthropology of mysticism could also lend support to such teaching. It was for this reason that he criticized the mystical doctrine of a divine spark in the soul. In the same year that he was reading Tauler's sermons for the first time, he singled out belief in such a spark of the soul (a *synteresis)* as leading the Ockhamists into their Pelagian heresy. "They believe that because the will has that spark, it is, although feebly, inclined to what is good. And they dream that that little motion toward doing the good, which man is naturally able to make, is an act of loving God above all things."[27]

We touch here on a very complex issue in Luther studies, so complex in fact that mysticism has also been seen as leading Luther himself into believing that well intentioned people could save themselves. In Luther's mature theology reliance on interior acts of humility in the quest for grace is considered no less Pelagian than reliance on exterior good works in the quest for grace. From this point of view the mystical way of salvation, with its contemplative exercises

••*WA* I, 879.

•• In addition to A. V. Muller, cited above, see H. A. Oberman, "Luther and Mysticism," in *The Reformation in Medieval PerS'pective,* 229.

[27] From the *Lectures on Romans* (1515-16), *WA 56,* 275.1711.

and programmatic self-denial, comes as much under Protestant criticism as does the Ockhamist theology of free will. There is evidence that this did not become clear to Luther until after 1518 and that prior to that time he too denied exterior but not interior good works, teaching that salvation was dependent on interior acts of humility; as one writer has put it, saving faith was *fides humilitate formata*.[28] This was not the mature Reformation theology which taught that saving faith came only by hearing the Word of God preached-*fides ex auditu*. If this interpretation of Luther is correct, then German mysticism aided him against Ockhamism in the years prior to 1518 only by leading him into a more subtle Pelagianism! Other scholars have argued that the influence of late medieval mysticism disposed Lutheran theology toward an individualism and subjectivism that deemphasized the sacramental life of the church.w

Luther, Ookhamism, and Mysticism.

Any assessment of the relation betweenLutherandmysticism must deal also with the relation between Luther and William of Ockham. It is clear that Luther disagreed with scholastic teaching on grace and free will and that among the scholastic theologians the Ockhamists were his main opponents. Ockham nonetheless remained Luther's teacher, and if a late medieval intellectual parentage of the Reformation is to be identified, Lutheranism was far more the child of Ockhamism than of German mysticism.[80] Luther's Ockhamist training disposed

[98] Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex auditu: Eine Untersuchung uber die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther* (Neukirchen, 1961).

••See Jared Wicks, *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther's Early Spiritual Teaching* (Washington D. C., 1968).

••The recent work of Bengt R. Hoffman, an ecumenical study attempting to align Luther as a theologian fully with the Catholic mysticism of Tauler and the *German Theology*, completely ignores the Ockhamist side of Luther's training. *Luther and the Mystics: A Reexamination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis, 1976). This, however, is but one of many problems with this ambitious study. See my review in *The Journal of Religion* (June, 1977).

him to a very different view of the world from that **found in** mysticism, and I believe his debt to Ockham goes far toward clarifying his highly selective use of mystical writings.

Ockhamist theology was a peculiar covenant theology, one that focused not on metaphysical qualities and connections between God and man, but on the will and words of each. Ockham, following Duns Scotus, did not believe that a saving relation between an individual and God was dependent in any final way on qualities within the individual (for example, infused habits of grace) or on any real connections between God, grace, and the soul. On this issue the Franciscans Scotus and Ockham represented a tradition in opposition to that of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. For Scotus and Ockham, salvation depended on God's eternal will, on his fidelity to his promises, on the trustworthiness of the divine word-not on qualities inherent in the church, the sacraments, or the soul of the believer. As in his philosophy Ockham made terms and verbal conventions the connecting links between the mind and reality in matters of true knowledge, so in his theology he made words and promises the connecting links between the soul and God in matters of salvation. Eckhart, in contrast, opposed the Scotist view of grace as secondary to the divine will in salvation and exaggerated the Thomist view of grace as a real, supernatural power within the soul. Eckhart's mystical theology reflected in the most extreme way this basic difference between the contending scholastic traditions of the thirteenth century.[81]

The Ockhamist theological orientation, which Luther came

[81] See Heinrich Ebeling, *Meister Eckharts Mystik. Studien zu den Geisteskiimpfen um die Wende des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Aalen, 1966), 146-59. Ebeling's thesis is that the distinctive features of Eckhart's mysticism resulted from this exaggerated defense of Thomist views on grace as a real, supernatural power immanent in the soul. My interpretation of Ockham draws on the revisionary work in modern Ockham scholarship. It is summarized by William Courtenay, "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in Charles Trinkaus, editor, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden, 1974), 26-58. See also the recent important study of Gorden Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester, 1975).

to share, had two effects. First, it transformed the nature of the church. In such a theology the church held its unique role as mediator between God and man not because of its alleged position within a supposed eternal metaphysical hierarchy, but as the result of a special historical act of God- because of an artificial arrangement. This is a point of view that caused the church to lose what might be called its "ontological claim" on man and present itself to the world as an object of faith. Not surprisingly the church of the later Middle Ages, which found its political and religious claims on men challenged by kings and popular religious movements, did not find such a theology congenial. It opted at official levels for Neoplatonic and Thomist theologies, which appreciated metaphysical hierarchy.

A second effect of the Ockhamist world view was what I would describe as an alteration of the boundary situation of the individual believer. In Neoplatonic and Thomist theologies the great trauma for the religious person is the possible non-existence of God. Given their metaphysical presuppositions these theologies know that if God is not, then nothing can be. They spend a great deal of time arguing, either on *a priori* grounds (St. Anselm) or on *a posteriori* grounds (St. Thomas), that God's existence can be proved. For man truly to be, he must in some way "be" God-that was the all-pervading concern of the late medieval German mysticism that grew from Neoplatonic and Thomist roots. It was this concern that led Eckhart and Tauler to endow man with a spark of divinity and view his union with God as a true deification.

In the Ockhamist tradition, by contrast, the existence of the Judaeo-Christian God remained an assumption of faith, never a probable philosophical argument. The will of God and man, not their being, occupied the center of attention. The trauma for the religious person became not the fear that God might not exist, but the fear that he might not keep his word. God's trustworthiness and dependability, not his existence, became the crucial religious problem. It was the problem to which the

young Luther repeatedly returned in his early works. From Luther and Calvin to the English and American Puritans the central problem of the religious man in Protestant theology has been, not the rationality of faith and the demonstrability of God's existence, but the certitude of salvation. I suspect that all the individual differences between the theology of Luther and that of Eckhart and German mysticism can be traced to the difference between the concerns of a covenant theology and those of a metaphysically based theology.

Later Developments in Protestantism.

We can put our thesis to a test by looking at three later developments in Protestantism: (1) the use made of German mysticism by Luther's Anabaptist and Spiritualist opponents; the revival of interest in medieval mysticism by Lutheran Pietists in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and (8) the peculiar doctrine of mystical union that came to dominate the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy in the same period.

(1) *German Mysticism Among Ana.baptists and Spiritualists.*

It is a revealing commentary on the place of German mysticism in Luther's theology that his strongest sixteenth century critics could not only draw support for their basic arguments against him from German mysticism, but could do so at precisely those points of mystical teaching which Luther himself was careful to avoid. This is especially true of the high anthropology of the mystics. As discontent with the seemingly low ethical results and intolerance of the Reformation grew, dissenters within Protestantism turned to the ascetic and mystical traditions of the Middle Ages to find support for their criticisms of the new Protestant movement. They believed they found an important sanction for religious innovation and pluralism in the writings of German mystics. A special Anabaptist edition of the *German Theology,* purportedly shorn of all Lutheran accretions, appeared in Worms in and circulated widely during the sixteenth century.

Certain groups, notably the Hutterites, were especially attracted to this work because they found in its stress on overcoming all sense of " I, me, my, and mine" a further justification of their practice of communally sharing all goods.[82]

Both Anabaptists and Spiritualists looked to eterman mysticism to find support for their belief that an ethical life and personal experience counted more than mere learning and historical tradition in matters of religious authority. Thomas Milntzer, who aspired to replace Luther as the magisterial reformer of Saxony, drew on Tauler's sermons to argue that true prophets, of whose number he counted himself, were taught directly by God in the depths of their hearts and were not, like Luther, men who had simply mastered the letter of Scripture.

Sebastian Franck and Valentin Weigel were Lutherans who came to criticize official Lutheranism as a new papacy. Both appropriated the high mystical anthropology of Eckhart and Tauler to argue that God's temple was built deep within the heart of every individual and should not be confused with external church laws, Scripture, and ceremonies. Weigel, a disenchanted Lutheran pastor, identified more literally than any other Protestant thinker with the high mysticism of Eckhart, Tauler, and the *German Theology.* The same subjectivist, egalitarian, and Donatist strains that caused the bishop of Cologne and Pope John XXII to fear the impact of Eckhart's sermons on the hearts of simple people made "Weigelianism" an epithet that summarized the gravest fears of Lutheran orthodoxy in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[88]

[81] G. H. Williams, "Popularized German Mysticism as a Factor in the Rise of Anabaptist Communism," in *Glaube, Geis.t, Geschichte: Festgabe fur Ernst Benz,* ed. G. Mueller and W. Zeller (Leiden, 1967), 290-81!!.

[88] Josef Koch, " Meister Eckharts Weiterwirken im Deutsch-Niederliindischen Raum im .14. und *15.* Jahrhundert," *La Mystique Rhinane,* ISS-56. See also the bull of condemnation (March 27, 1829) in Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 82nd edition (1968), pp. 290ff. On Weigel, see Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent,* 208ff. Among fourteenth and fifteenth century critics of Eckhart's teaching as revolutionary were the Dominicans of Toulouse, Gerhard Zerbolt of Zuphen, Jan

(2) *German Mysticism and Lutheran Pietism.*

Protestant malcontents were not the only ones who sought support from medieval mysticism. There was a resurgence of interest in mysticism among Lutherans in the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. Protestant editions of the works of St. Bernard and the sermons of Tauler appeared in the 1580s. The revival of Protestant interest in mysticism had two basic sources. On the one hand, it came as a reaction to the school theology and perfunctory religious practice of the established Lutheran churches. On the other hand, it was a reflection of the widespread revulsion to organized religion provoked by the religious wars of the period.

The new interest in mysticism had, as we have seen, what was considered its heretical side, one most directly associated with the mystical spiritualism of Valentin Weigel. Interest in mysticism also ran high, however, among the most conservative orthodox Lutheran theologians. On many sides, orthodox as well as heterodox, there was a desire to unite old Catholic mysticism with Lutheran orthodoxy as defined by the Formula of Concord (1577).[84]

A leader of the mystical revival in Lutheranism was Johann Arndt. His writings became the basic source of Pietist efforts to steer a middle course between the seemingly church-denying mysticism of Weigel and the perceived lifeless religion of the established churches. The work on which Lutheran pietists most often drew was Arndt's *Four Books on True Christianity,* published in 1610.[85] The Pietist leader, August Hermann

van Rusbroec, Jan van Leeuwen, Geert Groote, William of Ockham, and Johannes Wenck. See Degenhardt, 88-50.

••Cf. Wilhelm Koepp, *Joh. Arndt: Eine Untersuchung iiber die Myatik im Luthertum* (Berlin, 1912), 12-18; *Das Zeitalter des Pietismus,* ed. M. Schmidt and W. Jannash (Bremen, 1965). On the popular attraction of mystical ideas and images, see Paul Althaus, *Forschungen zur evangelischen Gebetsliterafor* (Giitersloh, 19£7), ch. 4, and Hermann Beck, *Die religiose Volkaliteratur du evangelis.chenKirche Deutschlands* (Gotha, 1891).

••The first book appeared in 1606 and the four of 1610 were later expanded to six.

Francke, praised this work as the first book on Christian life to which students should turn after the Bible, and Arndt's work also became popular among Catholics.[36] Arndt quoted from Tauler's sermons at length, and the third book of *True Christianity* was a veritable compendium of Tauler. Orthodox theologians criticized it for prefering mysticism to the Bible and some even denounced Arndt as a disciple of Weigel.

There are many high mystical themes in Arndt's *True Christianity*. He cites approvingly Tauler' s comments on the ground of the soul, which he describes as the " seat and city of God " within man. Like Luther before him, Arndt is especially fond of Tauler's exhortations to humility and self-denial. Paraphrasing and quoting Tauler, Arndt makes spiritual " similitude with God " the precondition of union with God. Mystical union is described as the " transfusion of the overflowing fulness of God's essence" into the believer, a union with the holy Trinity. Mystical union is presented as a higher religious stage, beyond that attainable by faith alone. Arndt also attacks what he calls " the pomp of ceremonial circumstance ... such as images, robes, churches, external fasts, oral prayers, and other outward works," as things hypocrites also do.[37]

Yet Arndt avoided some basic high mystical viewpoints. He did not describe union with God as unmediated, or make the claim, common to Eckhart and Tauler, that believers must become the eternal Son of the Father .[38] It is striking to see Arndt cite Tauler's high mystical views on union with God in one chapter and then turn in another to paraphrase Luther's " happy exchange " from the *Freedom of a Christian,* where faith alone is the agent of mystical marriage with Christ. Arndt

[86] Koepp, *Joh. Arndt,* 152.

[87] *True Christianity; or the Whole Economy of God Towards Man; and the Whole Duty of Man Towards God,* ed. and trans. by W. Jaques (London, 1815), Book III, ch. 21, p. 874; ch. 2, p. 809; ch. 4, pp. 818, 821; ch. 9, p. 885.

[88] Koepp, *Joh. Arndt,* 54. On Tauler's sermons used by Arndt and the changes Arndt made as he appropriated them, see Edmund Weber, *Johann Arndts Vi6r Biicher Vom wahren Christentum* (Marburz/Lahn, 1969).

appears only to juxtapose Tauler and Luther, never fully to merge the two; their teachings coexist in his work without coalescing. If this reflects a desire on Arndt's part to remain at peace with the orthodox Lutherans, as some maintain, it may also reflect his perception of a fundamental difference between high Catholic mysticism and Protestant piety. Arndt did not, however, believe it was contradictory for Lutheran faith and piety to culminate in a true mystical union of the believer with God.[89]

Despite the presence in his writings of high mystical themes and imagery, Arndt's interest in German mysticism was never that of a high mystical thinker. He was basically an earnest Lutheran who wanted his religion to be heartfelt and practical. The leitmotiv of *True Christianity* is the rejection of theology conceived as a science-what Arndt calls theology as " a set of doctrines or opinions to be learned in theory "-in favor of a theology that gives attention to " the other most noble faculties of the soul, namely, the will, thQ affections, and love." Not a theology that makes men " learned " by " reading and disputing," but one that makes them "holy" by " prayer and charity "-that, says Arndt, is his ideal.[40] He describes religious perfection as " self-denial, resignation of will, and love of neighbor." [41] He praises the *German Theology* a,s a penitential guide, wherein knowledge of Christ is a practical art, not a theoretical science.[42] He especially likes the way the *German Theology* integrates faith and justification with regeneration and new birth,[43] apparently the same combination he himself sought in his *True Christianity* by juxtaposing passages from Luther and Tauler.

[89] See Koepp, *Joh. Arndt,* "Das mystische soll nichts anders kommen, als durch das Luthertum und das Luthertum soil im organischen Weitergang seine Hohe und seine Spitze finden in der Mystik." *Ibid.,*

True Ohris.tianity, Introduction,

[41] *Ibid.,*

[42] *Die deutsche Theowgie, eine sehr alte, fur jeden Christen i.iusserst wichtige Schrift, mit einer Vorrede von Dr. M. Luther und dem gewesenen Generalsupermtendenten Johann Arnd,* ed. F. C. Kruger (Lemgo, 6-9.

[43] *Ibid.,* pp. 10,1s.

These same practical concerns are also paramount in later Pietist use of German mysticism. The Pietist leader Philip Jacob Spener wrote a preface to an edition of Tauler's sermons in which he praised medieval mystical writers as the ones who had preserved the "most light" during the dark Middle Ages. What made Tauler the chief among these guardians of the light for Spener was Tauler's concern for the inner man and criticism of external and mechanical religious practices (such as private masses). Spener remained sensitive to what he calls "a few terms and doctrines " in Tauler, which are not purely biblical, but he also believed that Tauler provided a cure for every papal error he shared due to his placement in time.[44]

More light is shed on Pietist interest in German mysticism by the dedication and preface to a 1720 Protestant collection of Tauler's writings, the *German Theology*, Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and treatises by Johannes von Staupitz, Luther's spiritual mentor. The author of both was Johann Daniel Herrnschmid a well-known Lutheran theologian and hymn-writer and student of Francke. Herrnschmid warns his readers that these writings must be read with discrimination, since errors as well as the light of God's truth appear in them. Some errors he ascribes to the time in which the authors lived, when Catholic teaching on the Mass, Purgatory, and the monastic life had not yet been exposed as false. Other errors in these works, however, are ascribed to what Herrnschmid calls " the special deficiency of mystical theology," namely, the absence in it of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone. Making every effort at accommodation, Herrnschmid explains that the three-fold mystical way of purification, illumination, and union can be adjusted to evangelical doctrine if the union with God is placed first rather than last in the sequence, since Protestants believe that the light of the Spirit and indwelling grace follow, rather than precede, the union of the believer with God in faith.[45] Despite

[44] In the Preface, dated S.ept. 13, 1680, in *Des. hocherleuchteten und theuren Lehrers D. Joh. Tauleri Predigten... samt dessen ubrigem. geistreicken Schrifjten* (Franckfurt a/M, 1720), A 3 a-A 4 a.

[45] In *Ibid.*, A 2 a-b.

the shortcomings of mysticism Herrnschmid urges Protestants to study it for its teaching on humility and self-denial and its witness to the fact that true Christian doctrine also antedates Luther, having been preserved by God among mystical writers during the long domination of the church by the papacy.[46]

Such were also Luther's reasons for recommending mystical writings. From Luther to the seventeenth-century Pietists, mystical writings served Protestants even though these writings were seen to lack the most basic Protestant doctrine. Protestant attraction to medieval mysticism lay consistently less in its genuine mystical import-its high anthropology and speculation on union with God-than in its ability to illumine and enliven, in concept and imagery, God's covenant with man.

(3) *Mystioal Union in Lutheran Orthodoxy.*

At one point Lutherans actually attempted to construct their own mystical theology and without dependence on medieval tradition. In the seventeenth century major Lutheran theologians derived a doctrine of mystical union from biblical sources and Luther's peculiar teaching about Christ's two natures and presence in the Lord's Supper. They did not, like Johann Arndt and the Pietists, turn to medieval mysticism. These theologians, who were among the most conservative of the age, were impressed by passages in the New Testament which depicted Christ as the head and the church as his body (Eph. 1: 22; 5: 32; 1 Cor. 6: 15), or described Christ as a vine and his followers as the branches (John 15: 1), or spoke, like Paul, of no longer living but having Christ as one's life (Gal. 2: 20), or, like 4, of the faithful as "partakers of the divine nature."[47] Here, they believed, something more than bare hearing and believing the gospel was clearly intended.

In addition to these biblical sources Lutheran theologians found additional resources for developing a doctrine of mystical union in the Eucharistic and Christological teaching of Luther. While disavowing transubstantiation, Lutherans still believed

••In *Ibid.,* a-b; Preface A b.
"Elert, *Morphologie* I, 185-87.

that Christ's body and blood were really present in the Eucharist. They rejected Calvinist arguments that Christ's ascension to the right hand of God prevented his bodily presence in the Eucharist. Such presence was possible, they argued, because Christ's human nature had the unique character of bearing the properties of his divine nature, one of which was ubiquity, or the ability to be present in many places at one and the same time. Hence, wherever the divine nature was spiritually present, so too was the human nature. A real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was plainly conceivable to Lutherans.

By analogy, Christ was believed to be in the soul of the believer in a real and essential way; Luther:an stress on Word and faith did not mean that Christ lived in the ears only.[48] " God lives and dwells essentially in those who love him," declared Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608); believers live in the Holy Spirit as well as in the world and already have eternal life in the Spirit.[49]

At first glance such descriptions of mystical union by orthodox Lutherans appear to repeat the teaching of German mysticism. It was, after all, Eckhart and Tauler who spoke so eloquently of essential divine indwelling and union with God. This is not, however, the case. The orthodox doctrine of mystical union finds its precedent in Luther's theology and the safeguards that distinguish the peculiarly Protestant and unmystical character of this union are everywhere in evidence. Although the believer is said to be essentially one with Christ, there is no talk of the kind of deification one finds in German mysticism. At this point the orthodox Lutherans carefully distinguished their teaching from the essential union of Valentin Weigel.[50]

•• " Die lutherische Theologie im Zeitalter der Konkordienformel lehrt die Einwohnung der Trinitat und Christi in den Gliiubigen, die als *conjunctio realis* (Gerlach) beschrieben wird, den Empfang gottlicher Majestiit durch die Gliiubigen (Brenz), aber auch eine essentielle Einung mit der menschlichen Natur Christi und eine substantielle mit dem H. Geiste (Chemnitz) bedeutet und vom Akt des Glaubens spezifisch unterschieden wird (Selnecker, *Konkordienformel)* ." *Ibid.,* 189.

'° Cited in *Ibid.,* 141.

10 Wilhelm Koepp, " Wurzel und Ursprung der orthodoxen Lehre von der Unio

Lutheran Christology provided the decisive model of a mystical union in which distance is maintained between the parties united. As the divine and human natures of Christ remained distinct and integral despite a union in which the properties of each nature were shared by the other, so in the mystical union of the believer with Christ, the believer and Christ became as one person, while nonetheless remaining in two distinct natures. [51]

Within the framework of Protestant covenant theology the Lutheran scholastics of the seventeenth century taught that one truly became what one believed. Such teaching was fully consistent with the theology of Luther and was not a revival of medieval mysticism. [52] In the language of mysticism they said something that was *unmystical.* Not only did their teaching maintain distance in the midst of union, but it also made faith the peculiar agent of this "essential indwelling " of of Christ and the Spirit. The faith that came by hearing penetrated the heart, enlivened the believer, endowed him with the righteousness of Christ, and made him certain of his salvation, while at the same time leaving him a creature fully conscious of his finitude, sinfulness, and worldly responsibilities.

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Mystica," *ZThK* NF 2 (1921), 46-71, 139-71; see esp. p. 54: "Die unio ist ohne jede Verandcrung und Vermischung (das ist notig, damit eine eigentliche 'Vergottung .' des Menschen vermieden wird)-und <loch wieder eine wesentliche Verbindung und Wesensvereinigung."

•• This is nicely elaborated by Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* I (Leipzig, 1885), Locus IV.

•• Elert, *Morphologie* I, 154. Elert strongly disagrees with the earlier work of Koepp, which attempts to derive the doctrine from Arndt and late medieval mysticism. See *ZThK* NF ft (1921), 166 and passim.

THE LOSS OF THE ORIGIN IN SOTO ZEN AND IN MEISTER ECKHART

SEVERAL JAPANESE AUTHORS who have come into contact with the Western tradition have underlined similarities between key concepts in Zen Buddhism and in Meister Eckhart.[1] Sometimes their statements, for instance Suzuki's, betray a rather superficial acquaintance with the schools of thought that intersectin Eckhart'shighly syncretistic teachings. Nevertheless I trust that there are resemblances; that they have to be located very deeply, on an experiential level; indeed that they touch upon the core of Eckhart's mysticism and the core of Zen enlightenment. Such point-by-point comparisons as are sometimes undertaken do not lead very far here. Rather, some hypothesis of interpretation is needed for a re-seizure, at one's own risk, of the matter itself, that is, of the experience to which both Zen and Eckhart testify. Let me call this experience the way of releasement. What I mean by this term will hopefully be clear in the end, although a full appropriation is possible only from a personal standpoint; the point where the interpreter stands in his own quest. The true realm of encounter between· such foreign traditions as a £ar-Eastern Buddhist sect of the twelfth century and our Medieval German late Scholastic is after all my own existence. " The reason why the Buddha so frequently refused to answer metaphysical problems," writes Suzuki, " was partly due to his conviction that the ultimate truth was to be realized in oneself through one's own effort."[2] And in Meister Eckhart: "He who

[1] See the works by H. Dumoulin, H.-M. Enomiya, W. Heinrich, Dom Le Saux, T. Merton, M. Nambara, K. Nishitani, R. Otto, H. W. Schomerus, D. T. Suzuki, S. Ueda. See also my *Meist(!ll' Eckhart, Mystic and Philosopher*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978, pp. 221-226. The four elements of Eckhart's teaching developed in the present article are exposed more in detail; *ibid.* pp. 84-121.

[2] D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism,* First Series. Grove Press: New York 1961, p. 61.

wants to understand (my teaching of detachment) has to be himself perfectly detached" (DW II, p. 109, 1).[3] "Now I beg you to be exactly as poor as I have said, so that you may understand my instruction, for if you do not resemble the truth we are talking about you will never be able to follow me" (DW II, p. 487, 5 f.). "Do not worry if you do not understand what I say; indeed, so long as a man does not resemble that truth he will remain unable to grasp my speech" (DW II, p. 506, 1 f.). Thus there is no other way of responsibly dealing with the convergence noticed by these Japanese authors than to somehow involve oneself in the way of releasement.

The impossibility of escaping one's own lived experience is even more patent in Soto Zen. As is well known, the two major Buddhist sects in Japan are Rinzai and Soto. Rinzai stresses abrupt means to obtain awakening, such as blows delivered by the master, shouts, question-and-answer sessions which a rationalist would qualify as absurd, and koans. Still Rinzai has produced an abundant literature, which is not the case with Soto. Indeed Soto simply follows one method, that of "just sitting" quietly in a rigorous posture called zazen. In Japanese *za* means to sit and *zen* means meditation. The seated meditation is the beginning, the end, and the essence of Soto, thus enforcing even more the anti-intellectualist slant that characterizes Zen in general. Rinzai and Soto correspond to two different intellectual temperaments, one relying on the concentration of the mind, the other on an intensely felt psychosomatic unity. A Rinzai master may eventually give metaphysical instructions, whereas a Soto master will hardly speak of anything more than the correct way to sit. He will show no interest for finding solutions, and he will be bored with speculations about nothingness. Here are some lines from a sermon entitled 'Zazen' by Master Meiho (rn77-1S50):

• The abbreviation "DW" refers to Meister Eckhart, *Die Deutschen und lateinischen Werke. Die deutschen Werka,* Stuttgart 1936 ff'. The roman numerals refer to the volume; they are followed by page and line numbers. "LW" refers to *Die lateinischen Werke,* and to F. Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des 14. Jahrhunderts,* Leipzig 1857.

Zen-sitting is the way of perfect tranquility: inwardly not a shadow of perception, outwardly not a shade of difference between phenomena. Identified with yourself you no longer think, nor do you seek enlightenment of the mind or disburdenment of illusions. You are a flying bird with no mind to twitter, a mountain unconscious of the others rising around it. Zen-sitting has nothing to do with the doctrine of teaching, practice and elucidation. You do not bother with sutras or ideas. The superior student is neither attached to enlightenment nor to illusion. Taking things as they come, he sits in the proper manner, making no idle distinctions.... All (teachings) are comprised in Zen-sitting and emerge from it. Even a moment of sitting will enable you to free yourself from life and death.[4]

As the master-student relationship is the only way to learn Zen, an implicit reference is made throughout this paper to a period of time that I spent with Master Deshimaru from Kyoto, who also lives part of the time in France.

The synthetic concept that I wish to develop as standing at the core both of the experience in zazen and of Eckhart's mysticism is the loss of the origin. In a first approach, let me define this concept as the retreat of a metaphysical First, or of an *arche.* By that I designate an ultimate point of reference, for instance Substance in Aristotle, the Christian God in Scholasticism, the Mind in Hegel, etc. I shall thus speak of the anarchic essence of Zen and Eckhartian mysticism. The term ' anarchy ' has to be understood literally as the absence of a beginning, of an origin in the sense of a first cause. It must also be understood as negating the complement of *arche,* namely *telos.* I claim that the logic of releasement as it is lived in zazen and by Eckhart leads to the destruction of origin and goal not only in the understanding of the world but even in human action. At this point it may suffice, in order to substantiate my *a priori,* to remind you of Eckhart's frequent injunction to "live without why" (DWI, p. 90, U et al.), that is, without purpose. "Those who seek something with their action, those who act for a why, are bondsmen and hirelings" (DW II, p. 4 f.). "If you

'L. Stryk, ed., *World of Buddha, A Read&,* Doubleday Anchor: New York 1969, p. 868 f.

ask a genuine man who acts out of his own ground: 'Why are you doing what you do?' he will reply, if his answer is as it should be: **'I** do it because I do **it'"** (DWI, p. 3f.). Likewise, a Zen master would simply laugh at questions concerning the beginning and the end of things, the whence and wherefore--for instance of good and evil. Meiho, in the zazen-sermon just quoted, also states: " You must guard yourself against the easy conceptions of good and evil." He does not mean easy conceptions as opposed to difficult conceptions, but that good and evil are in and of themselves easy conceptions. To make the anarchic intention of his sermon perfectly clear he continues: you should " ask who is above either," that is, above good and evil. A human act here is no longer understood out of its origin and its goal, but it is a genuine act precisely in so far only as it lacks both! The principle of anarchy may even have political consequences, not the ones recommended by Bakunin and Proudhon, but perhaps in the sense of a replacement of the metaphor of the body in the understanding of the city by the metaphor of play. The metaphor of the body and its members is metaphysical; it refers the different organs in man to the chief organ, the head, and thus allows for an efficacious exercise of authority, as the Roman consul Menenius Agrippa explained to the slaves entrenched on the Aventine Hill. The metaphor of play introduces fluidity into institutions as it deprives corporatisms and established hierarchies of· their *arche.* **If** the way of releasement is anarchic in its essence then the experience of zazen as well as of Eckhartian itinerancy is anti-metaphysical. Indeed metaphysics requires a *principium,* a ' principle ' to which everything else is referred, and a political philosophy derived from metaphysics requires a *princeps,* a 'prince' or some other supreme authority. *Arche* and *telos* are two modes in which the metaphysical First-Plato's ' Good,' the neo-Platonic 'One' or Scholastic' Being itself '-appears. I call the loss of the origin the progressive disappearance of this metaphysical First on the path of releasement which is the sole design in Zen-sitting and in Eckhart's preaching. 'Release-

ment ' is the translation of the Middle High German *gelazenheit,* or the modern *Gelassenheit.* Another way to translate this key concept (derived from ' *laxare,'* French ' *laisser*') would be ' letting-be.' I should now like to suggest four steps of such progression towards anarchy. They are simply taken from a programmatic declaration by Meister Eckhart himself:

> Whenever I preach I usually speak of detachment and that man must become bereft of himself and of all things; secondly that one should be remodeled into the image of the simple good which is God; thirdly that one should remember the great nobility which God has deposited in the mind in order for man to reach God through it; fourthly of the purity of the divine nature (DW II, p. *528, 5* f.).

I. *Detachment*

The first of the four steps towards ·attainment of release is detachment, *Abgeschiedenheit.* It so happens that these four steps of destruction of the origin can very easily be traced in the development of Zen-sitting. I shall first show how detachment is the prerequisite for the seated meditation.

In Zen-sitting everything begins with a violent negation. The masters love to speak of a duel unto death. Either the enemy dies, they say, or I die. This moment of violence to oneself is the beginning of the sitting experience. Zazen is a battle-posture for "ego-killing." Quite as in fencing it is the posture that makes you die or live. The position of the chin, the spine, the thumbs, the pelvis: this is the material of which Soto ' mysticism,' if that word applies, is made. Plus endurance. It is evident that zazen originated in the warrior class, the samurai. As in the art of archery the starting posture must be taken with " serene fervor" and deadly seriousness. Again, quite as in fencing, the masters say, a moment of distraction in zazen may bring death: in fencing because of the sword, in zazen because without satori I am a dead man.

This violent negation is different from an ascetic rejection of the world or of one's desires. Detachment is not more ascetic than any other momentary effort of concentration. It is the

exertion of totally liberating the mind from its images and preoccupations. This is achieved through the perfect seated posture. Not only mental representations have to be chased, or let pass as clouds, but also the very wish for satori, even the very thought of death or of life. The sole object of concentration is the posture. Intellectuals definitely have difficulty with zazen. Deshimaru loved to tell how during the Second World War he prevented a Japanese ship loaded with gunpowder from exploding simply by sitting on top of the dynamite for forty-eight hours in zazen posture with extreme concentration.

Detachment here means voluntary emptiness: at the outset of zazen one has to realize the " twentyfold void," that is, the absence of all preoccupations except for the ferocious determination to sit correctly. If one practices zazen for the sake of whatsoever, be it health or enlightenment, it will produce no effect. But medical results and satori may ensue. There are long lists of negations in this tradition: we have to rid ourselves from the things within, any kind of thought, and the things without, any objective quality; we have to rid ourselves even from the quest for emptiness. The will must will not to will. Texts on this matter abound, but I am content here with stating what happens in the seated meditation. There is first of all a violent negation of any object of volition and of conception.

If we now pass to Meister Eckhart we find the same type of violent negation at the beginning of the path of releasement. The word itself that Eckhart uses for detachment expresses the idea of riddance: *abegescheidenheit,* in modern German *Abgeschiedenheit,* is formed from the prefix *ab-* which designates a separation (*abetuon:* to rid oneself of something; *abekere:* turning away, apostasy) and of the verb *scheiden* or *gescheiden.* In its transitive form, this verb means " to isolate," " to split," " to separate," and in its intransitive form "to depart," " to die." The word *abegescheidenheit,* " detachment " or " renunciation," and related verbs of deliverance evoke, in the allusive thought of Meister Eckhart, a mind that is on the way to dispossessing

itself of all exteriority which might spoil its serenity.[5] However, Eckhart's speculative temperament leads him to reflect on the ontological condition of such violent negation of all that can be known or willed. The following lines have in this respect been often misunderstood:

All creatures are mere nothingness. I do not say that they are small or anything at all: they are mere nothingness (DW I, p. 69, 8 f.).

What is it that has to be negated at the outset of the way of releasement? All creatures, Eckhart answers. Why is this so? Because, being made, they are already nothing. " Creature " in Eckhart designates a being which incessantly receives itself from elsewhere; it has received existence, life and intelligence from another. It does not possess itself, the other is its being; in itself it is nothing.

What does not possess being is nothingness. But no creature has being, for its being depends on the presence of God. Were God to withdraw, for an instant, from all creatures, they would be annihilated (DW I, p. 70, f.).

From the condition of creature, Eckhart concludes that the created is nothingness. Sometimes he speaks in images: "As long as the creature is creature, it carries within itself bitterness and harm, wrong and distress" (DW II, p. 7f.). This is a metaphorical way of stating the nothingness of creaturehood.

[6] Angelus Silesius, physician and poet, who died in 1674, was one of those who no doubt have best understood the Eckhartian preaching on detachment. In his *Cherubinic Pilgrim* he adopts even the vocabulary of the Master. He is, so to speak, Meister Eckhart's versifier. *Abge!lchiedenheit, .Lauterkeit, Eigensckaft, Bildlosigkeit, Jungfrauschaft-aII* the Eckhartian terms are known to him:

Weil Abgeschiedenheit sich niemand macht gemein
So muss sie ohne Sucht und eine Jungfrau sein.
Vollkommne Lauterkeit is bild-, form-, liebelos,
steht aller Eigenschaft wie Gottes Wesen bloss.

Since detachment makes itself familiar to no one / it has to be without desire and virginal. / Perfect purity has neither figure, nor form, nor love, / it is devoid of all property, as the being of God.

Angelus Silesius, *Der cherubinische Wandersmann* (hrsg. von J. Schwabe), Basel 1955, p. 41.

A short inquiry into Eckhart's vocabulary of being is necessary to understand the concept of nothingness as it appears at the starting point of the way of releasement.

Eckhart uses three groups of words for "being." The word *wesen* is the most remarkable because of its semantic broadness. Generally it is used to translate in a verbal manner the being of beings which the Scholastics designated by *ens commune*. But it covers a much wider extent and overlaps with "essence." *Wesen* is the word for the totality of what shows itself, under the aspect of its appearance. Conversely, *unwesene* is reserved by Meister Eckhart for that appearance which, at the same time, retreats into concealment, that is, into the darkness in which the mind acts in perfect conjunction with God.

> The soul acts in *unwesene,* and it follows God who acts in *unwesene* (DWI, p. 151, 11 f.).

In a certain sense, *unwesene* could be translated by "nothingness"; but as it expresses the abolition of the positivity of being, it points, so to speak, not beneath but beyond being, as the *hyper-on* of the Neoplatonists. In the *unwesene* of the Godhead, the activity of the ground of the soul is identical with the actuality of God. *Unwesene,* then, does not apply to creatures. The opposition between being and nothingness in creatures is expressed in a different terminology. The Middle-High-German word for "nothing" is *niht.* It is composed of the particle of negation *ne-* and of *iht,* "something" or "anything whatsoever." "The creature is nothing." What exactly is it that Eckhart wants to negate in the created? *Iht* is denied; the creature is not "a something." *Iht* designates the existing as such: the creature endowed with a borrowed being, the *entitas* of the *ens* or the *ousia* of the *on. Iht* speaks of a being with regard to the fact that it is. It denotes that which qualifies thought to represent to itself a being as a being. *Niht* is the negation of the fact of being. The creature in general cannot be represented as being; its *iht* resides in God, not in itself. The individual being is called *ihtes iht,* "this individual being" or "this something." Here the terminology is most incisive. The

corresponding negation, *nihtes niht* is properly translated by "non-being." It expresses the negation of the individual perfection of being. The individual being is not, it does not possess *ihtes iht.*

The opposition between *iht* and *niht* provides the conceptual tool with which Meister Eckhart grasps the domain of the created. "All creatures are *ein lUter niht* " : this applies to the created in general. As for *nihtes niht,* it designates that" nothingness " which is the individual creature. Such a creature is *ein later nihtes niht.* In all strictness, the individual creature is not. Its being is in God. Its being does not properly belong to itself. This applies to any particular image, to any object or work, and most of all to man himself in so far as he is created: all·these inhibit detachment and are *nihtes niht,* nothing (e.g. DW I, p. 14, f.) . The voluntary negation at the outset of the way of releasement must not miss a single being.

The third family of words derives more directly from the verb " to be." They are the words *sin,* to be, and *isticheit,* which is constructed out of *ist,* it " is," and designates primarily God's being. Meister Eckhart sometimes connects it with *wesen* and calls God the *weselichei sticheit* (e.g. DWI, p. 19, 1 f.). *Wesen,* too, is then mainly found in the context of divine union. Now the union is no longer considered apophatically as a veiling darkness, but cataphatically as an identity in the primordial being. *Isticheit* should be translated by" authentic being." *Sin* and *isticheit* have often the same extension and comprehension:

God's being is my being and God's authentic being is my authentic being (DWI, p. 106, 1 f.).

We now understand better Eckhart's enigmatic statement that " the creature is mere nothingness " : *iht* comes to a thing as God incessantly lavishes being upon his creature. Let God's prodigality of *iht* cease for an instant, and the universal presence of the cosmos will immediately vanish.

All creatures are with God and God grants them their appearance together with his presence (DWI, p. 106, 1 f.).

Outside of God there is nothing but only nothingness (DW I, p. 858, 2).

Finally, in some texts "nothing" takes on a moral meaning; sin is nothing. But by temperament as well as by conviction, Eckhart is not a moralist. These passages are found in his scholarly works, in Latin, and are less significant. Even here, Eckhart proposes a " metaphysics " rather than a morals of sin.

Both in Soto Zen and in Eckhart detachment thus designates a violent effort upon oneself. That the language of the samurai class is reminiscent of war and that of the class 0£ theologians rather of metaphysical abstraction is perhaps not that important a difference. The profound cleavage that I see at this first stage 0£ the way of releasement is that Eckhart negates attachment £or the sake of God: detachment is necessary because 0£ the mode 0£ the divine presence. This mode is called a bestowal *in fluxu et fieri,* constant reception. I am not my being, but I receive it; what I am as a creature is nothingness. Here the principle of anarchy, that is, the overcoming of the representation 0£ a metaphysical supreme being which would be the beginning and the end of all that there is, is hardly sensible yet as motivating thought as well as action. But one guesses already that Eckhart's theocentrism, which distinguishes him on this first level from Zen, will perhaps collapse under the implacable logic 0£ releasement which teaches one to let everything be. The boldness 0£ Eckhart's position appears clearly when one has understood that the difference between created and uncreated introduces identity and otherness into man himself: identity with God in the ground of the mind, and otherness in the faculties or powers 0£ the soul, and in the body. Man is the locus 0£ union and disunion. In the " ground," man lives in God and God in him; but in his creaturehood, man is of the world. The difference between God and not-God is a cleft that splits man thoroughly. Only out 0£ this cleft can one speak 0£ God, man, and the world. At this point, it should not surprise us any longer that Eckhart actually abolishes the methodological distinction between theology, anthropology and cos-

mology. All these three sciences would have to develop the same opposition between " in-God " and " with-God " which is entrusted to man alone. He is at the same time the being-there and the being-elsewhere of the origin; he is among all beings the one that is alike-unlike the origin. The discovery of this simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity to the origin is the result of the fir.st point in Eckhart's programmatic statement mentioned above.

When the Father engendered all creatures, he brought me forth. I emanated together with all creatures and yet I remain within, in the Father (DW I, p. 376, 7 f.).

Awakening arises from a philosophical meditation on the being of creatures: inclining oneself towaxds creatures results in being commingled with them in nothingness. Detachment is an urging which demands of man that he " let nothingness be" (DWI, p. 170, 4) and return towards his origin.

II. *Remodeling*

The second element of teaching announced by Eckhart is " that one should be remodeled into the simple good which is God." This is a step further than detachment. Until now we have spoken of the radical dissimilarity between the created and the Creator; now the man engaged on the way of releasement discovers a similarity between himself and his origin-God as *arche* and *telos* of his road. Releasement appears as assimilation. But again, let us first look at the second step in Zen-sitting.

After the effort of intense negation a remodeling does indeed take place. The tradition describes this as an assimilation to Buddha. The remodeling of the personality through sitting occurs in ten stages:

1) Hell. To the beginner Zen-sitting is literally hell; this is the title some masters give to the sufferings in one'.s knees, legs, shoulders, spine, etc. The mind is confused, the body feels thoroughly uncomfortable. One feels contracted, anxious, and

one counts the minutes left until the end of the session. The face is twisted, all movements betray embarrassment.

Avidity. The masters call the second stage that of the deceased who are still hungry for life but cannot satisfy their hunger. They are totally conditioned by desire and avidity. During zazen one is eager to obtain enlightenment. The head is pulled slightly forwards as if one were to hit the wall before which the meditation takes place. One is avid for peace, health, mental tranquility and totally preoccupied by these thoughts. The mind is all hunger for acquisition.

3) Sensuality. The next step is called bestiality: like an animal one thinks of eating and drinking, the sexual desire becomes excessive. At the same time, one is often taken over by torpor and drowsiness. The mind sags and easily produces auditory and visual hypnagogic hallucinations. At this stage one sleeps a lot at night, easily half again as long as usual. These hallucinations may simply consist in a feeling of inner expansion. This is the moment when people speak of their unity with the universe, their cosmic soul, their identification with Buddha- in fact, pure imagination.

4) Battle. This is a state of aggressiveness. One quarrels, tries to win arguments and to make one's superiority felt. When one hears the master's stick hit another adept in the dojo one feels content and thinks: my zazen is better. To receive the stick at this point is like a humiliation. One has but one desire; to be the best. And one feels irritated when one becomes aware of one's own irritability, because crankiness does not fit into the picture of perfection.

5) Concern. Things become simplified, but one's mind is very much with daily business. The posture is now good and natural. However it is far from being light, although it is ordinary. Family matters, job problems and the like create unending preoccupations. There occurs a hypertrophy of concrete memory and hence of worries. Details from the past and threats

from the future weigh down the posture. According to the Buddhist metaphors, after hell, limbo and animality, this is properly the human condition.

6) Light. This state is compared to that of angels. The Sanskrit term that applies here, *deva,* is from the same Indo-European root as *dies,* day, but also *deus,* god. The idea is that of radiance. The posture becomes so pleasant that one falls into narcissism. To practice zazen is pure joy, and many take these agreeable feelings for satori. But in genuine satori no extraordinary kind of feeling prevails.

7) Dogmatism. At this stage one feels totally at home in Zen, not only physically as in the previous moment, but also intellectually. One has the correct answers about releasement and dispossession, one understands the meaning of emptiness, and one is ready to dispense instruction to whoever wants to listen. One has studied the scriptures and again one feels enlightened. But this is merely intellectual enlightenment. One lives among ideas.

8) Immobility. It now seems superfluous to practice zazen with others. One retreats into solitude and meditates alone for long periods. The consequence is a physical stiffness and mental rigidity. One thinks one has outgrown the masters and refuses to accept their correction. By excessive self-reliance the mind grows hard. There is no compassion in such a human being. His personality has become immobile; he does not progress unless he opens himself up to others.

9) Compassion. Along the roads in Japan one can see statues of Bodhisattva: Buddha is not locked up in temples but belongs to all, hence the location of these statues in public places. Likewise at this penultimate state one belongs to all. One has somehow become :a living Buddha. All attachments are gone. The posture is perfect. One does not desire enlightenment, yet one communicates a sense of it. One is able to practice Zen-sitting at any place, even in the middle of city crowds.

10) Nothingness. One Japanese name for Buddha is' hotoke,' which means to untie, release, set free, disentangle, divest, lay bare, become nothing. This is the state of complete awakening. Whether one sits in the Zen posture or whether one does not sit makes no difference any longer. I shall briefly refer to this state again a little later.

It is important to see that these stages do not necessarily follow one after the other. In one single se.ssion one may pass from :a beginner's state to a much more advanced one. One may go through several states and then regress again very quickly. The ideal is, as Master Dogen put it, to keep our hands open so that all the desert's sand may pass through them; if we close our hands we shall retain only a few grains of sand. Such is the goal of the remodeling of the personality in Soto Zen. The process of assimilation makes one become like Buddha.

Meister Eckhart does not hesitate to say that the process of assimilation makes us become like God. " One should be remodeled into the image of the simple good which is A simile frequently used by him in this regard is that of fire: when a burning straw is brought close to a tree-trunk, the wood, at first, refuses to catch fire. The dissimilarity is too great. But an ember buried in the ashes and smoldering overnight will not long resist the flame; crackling will soon fill the fireplace. Likewise man is assimilated to God. The technical term here is *gelfoheit* which means both similarity and equanimity.

> God's endeavor is to give himself to us entirely. Just as fire seeks to draw the wood into itself and itself into the wood, it first finds the wood unlike itself. It takes a little time. Fire begins by warming it, then heating it, and then it smokes and crackles because the two are so unlike each other. The hotter the wood becomes, the more still and quiet it grows. The more it is likened to the fire, the more peaceful it is, until it becomes entirely flame. That the wood be transformed into fire, all dissimilarity must be chased out of it (DW I, p. 180, 7 f.).

Quite as in Zen, the strategy of releasement leads from dissimilarity to similarity, and from similarity to union. The com-

parison with the fire which, by assimilation, attracts the ignitable to the perfection of the ignited, suggests a slow growth too: in order for the blaze to absorb the wood, " it takes a little time." The wood is reborn as the " son " of the blaze, by *gelicheit.* When the absorption is completed, the wood will be the perfect image of the fire:

> Nothing is so much alike and unlike at the same time ... as God and the creature. What is there indeed so unlike and like each other as these whose unlikeness is their likeness, whose indistinction is distinction itself? . . . Being distinct by indistinction, they resemble by dissimilarity. The more they are unlike, the more they are alike (LW II, p. 112, 7 f.).

The like and the unlike are resolved by flames and incandescences. Assimilation spreads the simplicity of that to which we are likened.

Gelicheit means more than equality. It gathers two beings under the same becoming, such as fire and wood in combustion, while equality is non-dialectical and exhausts itself in comparisons. Between the child and the father there is a likeness based on common ancestry and destiny. Between the father and his business associate, there is equality-for instance before the law. Equality refers only to the present. Similarity and assimilation, on the other hand, point upstream: *gelicheit* recalls the .source or the beginning; it also points downstream: it intimates the assimilation, that is, the goal or end of the transformation. Assimilation is like an exodus; it is properly the transition from the origin as *arche* to the origin as *telos.*

In some sermons, Eckhart expands his theory of assimilation into a theology of the image of God: " outside of likeness, one cannot speak of an image " (DWI, 4 f.) .

> An image is not of itself, nor is it for itself. It has its origin in that of which it is the image. To that it belongs properly with all that it is. It does not belong to what is foreign to this origin, nor does it owe anything to this. An image receives its being immediately from that of which it is an image. It has one being with it and it is the same being (DW I, p. 269, 2 f.) .

Eckhart's speculation on the being of images echoes patristic ponderings on the same subject. Imagine a man standing before a mirror. Properly speaking, where does the image that absorbs his attention reside? Does its being inhere in the body frem which it emanates, or rather in the reflection which he contemplates? "The image is in me, of me, towards me," answers Eckhart (DW I, p. 154, 1 £.). Were I to move back a. step, the image would no longer exist.

> Every image has two properties. The first is that it receives its being immediately from that of which it is an image, without interference of the will. Its outgoing is indeed natural, and it thrusts itself out of nature like a branch from the tree. When an image is cast on a mirror, our face will be reflected in it whether it likes it or not. . . . The second property of the image lies in its resemblance (DW I, p. 9 f.) .

The first point accords with the conclusion on created being: the image has no proper being, being comes to it from another, it does not exist originarily. The image exists only in its" outgoing" *(uzganc).* The .second point explains from where it extracts its being: it is nothing else but that very dependence we call reflection. Eckhart applies these considerations to the relationship between man and God. Man, as an image of God, remains " with " him of whom he is the image, distinct from him and not " in " him. Man as an image emanating from God stays at the periphery of the origin. A first application of the principle of anarchy occurs when Eckhart states that man must become *ungelwh,* unlike anything created, and totally *entgelwhet,* no longer resembling any being, so as to be perfectly like God.

These remarks on mirroring and on the being of an image are one model used by Eckhart to explain his theory of similarity and assimilation. According to another model, that of the human word, he will say that man should be an " adverb," *btwort,* to the Word or Verb of God.

> I have in mind the little word *quasi* which means " like " ; children in school call it an adverb. This is what I intend in all my sermons.

The most appropriate things that one can say of God are" Word" and "Truth". God called himself a "Word". Saint John says: 'In the beginning was the Word', meaning by this that we should be an adverb to this same Verb (DWI, p. 154, 7 f.).[6]

A detached human being is destined to become an ad-Verb. Eckhart's thought proceeds along the following lines. A man speaks. Through the numerous words of his discourse, it is possible that one single utterance makes itself heard and stands out to whoever knows how to listen. To the hearer, words may then seem suddenly so transparent that he is able to declare: "Now I know exactly what you mean." From the flow of many statements, he is able to assimilate the single intention that they all purport. We speak of what someone" means," although he pronounces perhaps many sentences and periphrases. The numerous words "mean" one single utterance. A single thought or sense makes itself understood in all the vocables. We do not only follow word after word, but we" get the idea," we comprehend one single utterance which is necessarily broken up into many words.

It may also happen that this single utterance appears as the focus where the sheaves of thought and feeling converge. It is around this type of utterance that biographers build their reports. Such a focus is a Word of existence: a forever unpro·· nounceable single Word in which a life is comprehended. From the struggles of a man an utterance emerges which shows and conceals itself as the impetus behind the many expressions coming from him and transmitted to us. The gospels can be read in this way and so can the sermons of Meister Eckhart.

This *wort,* Word of existence, has to become a *Mwort,.* adverb for the Verb. God has not begotten man "like" his image, but he has made him "in" or towards his image: *ad imaginem,* ad-Verb. The assimilation always remains to be perfected. The

• Ein einziges Wort hilft mir, schreibts Gott mir einmal ein,
So werd' ich stets ein Lamm mit Gott gezeichnet sein.

One single word can help me, if God one day inscribes it in me, / I shall be for always a lamb marked with the seal of God.

Angelus Silesius, *op. cit.,* p. 114. This single word is God's Word.

secret of the mind, understood as an image, is *ad:* it is unlike all things, yet like God. Eckhart draws perhaps too radical a distinction between the human mind as an image of God and creation in general; conversely, he does not distinguish the mind enough from the divine Persons. Like the Son and the Spirit, the mind is defined by its *ad* which establishes it near to God. Just as Christ is with the Father, the detached man should be with Christ, in turn engendering the unique Word which he becomes himself. Then the assimilation will be perfect. In a sermon on Justice, Eckhart illustrates this teaching by the proximity of Eve to Adam:

> The just live eternally "with God", directly with God, neither below nor above. They accomplish all their works with God, and God accomplishes his own with them. Saint John says: 'The Word was with God'. It was totally alike and next to him, neither below nor above but alike. When God created man, he drew woman from the rib of man, so that woman was alike to man. He made her neither from the head nor from the feet, so that she would be neither above nor below man, but that she would be equal to him. Likewise the just mind is to be equal with God and next to him: exactly alike, neither inferior nor superior to him. (DW I, p. 106, 4 f.).

The word is with God (b'i *gate),* Eve was with Adam, the just man is with Justice: likewise the man devoid of all created images is with God and is the image of God.

From likeness springs praise:

> What praises God? It is likeness. Thus everything in the soul which is like God praises God. What in any way is unlike God does not praise God. In the same way an image praises the artist who has imprinted upon it all the art that he has in his heart, thus making it entirely like himself. This similarity of the image praises its master without words (DWI, p. 318, 4 f.).

Eckhart's way of expressing man's remodeling into similarity with the divine is certainly more abstract than the itinerary of Zen-sitting. The concreteness of zazen stems from the importance, extraordinary for a Westerner, that Soto masters attribute to the body iand its development. Also Eckhart's theory

of assimilation is far more theocentric than Zen. Despite these two reservations-and the more we discover now the anarchic element in Eckhart the more they will both collapse- it should be clear at this point that the logic of the way of releasement in zazen and in Eckhart is to deliver what is most originary in man through the unlearning of possession and attachment. The ultimate attachment that has to be let go is the idea of origin in the sense of cause and end, of project and goal. This fundamental renewal of the human being through the apprenticeship of releasement has now to be explained in terms of its consequence, the loss of the origin.

III. *Nobilit;y*

The third thesis in Eckhart's preaching requires "that one should remember the great nobility which God has deposited in the mind in order for man to reach God through it." Eckhart has dedicated an entire treatise, *The Nobleman* (DW V, p. 109-119), to this concept. "Nobility" is a technical term in his writings which designates the capacity of the ground of the mind to unite itself to the ground of God. It is roughly equivalent to Augustine's 'capax Dei.' Man's nobility lies in his natural indistinction from God: " Where there is distinction you will find neither the One nor being nor God nor rest nor happiness nor satisfaction. Be One, then you find God " (DW V, p. 115, 7 f.) . The unity that is naturally given remains at the same time a task to he achieved: one must become " One with the One, One from One, One in One; and in One, One-eternally" (DW V, p. 119, 6 f.). Here the difference between the originative and the originated has vanished. But again, let us first look at Zen-sitting.

Zen can be qualified in general as a quest for identity, and this in a twofold sense. On the one hand it is a quest for the self. The following words are engraved on the meditation stick: "We must see our true self, we must look into the truth of our mind." On the other hand zazen as a quest for identity is also a quest for identification, namely with Buddha-and thus a

loss of identity. It is the practice of sitting in the mind's impersonal center. In his chapter *On Life and Death Master* Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in the thirteenth century, wrote: "If we release our body and our spirit, if we forget our self and if we abandon ourselves to the power of Buddha, mental activity becomes useless; we are ready to separate ourselves from life or death, we awake, we become Buddha." [7] The key to zazen lies in the realization that self-identity and identification with Buddha are one and the same, and that they arise from the perfect posture. Man's nobility, according to Zen, is to become Buddha and thus to become himself. Now this is nothing extraordinary; there is not the slightest trace of extasis in Soto Zen. Rather the enlightenment is the awareness of our most ordinary self, the space we live in when our mind is open rather than constricted; when it is no longer inhibited by self-erected obstacles. It is no surprise that zazen is useful for accelerating psychoanalytic treatment, as it removes in ourselves all that obstructs total presence to whatever there is. Zen is the uninvolved attention to things as they are rather than as they should or used to be. As Suzuki puts it: "Zen is our ordinary mindedness; that is to say there is in Zen nothing supernatural or unusual or highly speculative that transcends our everyday life. When you feel sleepy, you retire; when you are hungry, you eat." [8]

I do not claim any doctrinal identity betwen releasement in zazen and in Eckhart's sermons. However, it should be patent by now that releasement exhibits the same structure in either case: it is an existential itinerary, its essence is the unlearning of possession, its starting point is an effort of the will, its consequence-and this is the point I want to make now-is an identification with the origin by which the distinction between originative and originated is abolished. The essential feature of the origin is to show itself as a cause: efficent or normal cause when it appears as *arclw,* final cause when it appears as *telos.* The prin-

[7] Quoted by Taisen Deshimaru, *Vrai Zen,* Paris 1969, p. 71.
[8] D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism,* First Series, N. Y. 1961, p.

ciple of anarchy which determines the way of releasement both in Zen and in Meister Eckhart consists in the destruction of causality as an appropriate category for the understanding of being. It is important to see that the progressive loss of the origin in either case is a matter of practice. By temperament Zen insists more on the destruction of causality as the 'why' and 'wherefore' in daily life whereas Eckhart is a metaphysician. Again, I do not claim that the concept of the origin designates the same reality in Zen and in Eckhart. It obviously does not since already the representation of a highest being is totally alien to Buddhism. But I do claim that in the progress of releasement the idea of an ultimate-be it a principle of life, or a supreme cause, or even an ethical reason for behavior-becomes meaningless. Before carrying this idea of anarchy still further, let us look at Eckhart's theory of identity as the concept of nobility suggests it. Indeed, resemblance with God is not enough. To be an image of God is not enough:

> Scripture says that we have to become like God. 'Like', the word is bad and deceptive. If I liken myself to someone else, and if I find someone who is like me, then this man behaves as if he were I, although he is not and deceives people about it. Many things look like gold, but since they are not, they lie. In the same way all things pretend to be like God; but they are lying, since they are not like him. God can no more suffer likeness than he can suffer not being God. Likeness is something that does not occur in God; what does occur in the Godhead and in eternity is oneness. But likeness is not oneness *(glicheit enist niht ein).* Whenever I am one with something, I am not like it. There is nothing alien in oneness. In eternity there is only oneness, but not likeness (DW I, p. 215, IO f.).

How are we to understand this oneness or identity with God? Eckhart never speaks or thinks of substantial identity, rather he calls this an identity" *einim gewurke* ", identity in operation.

We may think of what happens in music, when the hearer is "all ears." If he does not know how to reproduce inwardly, simultaneously, identically, that which his ears hear, if by distraction or incapacity he omits to accompany in himself the

sounds that the senses perceive, then he does not know how to listen. Properly speaking, perfect listening implies that the distinction between the soloist, on one side, and the listener, on the other,. is no longer true. Through the unique event of the song which enraptures us, one identical being accomplishes itself. Thus the fundamental determination of existence is "operative identity" or, in homage to Aristotle, "energetic identity." [9] According to Eckhart, human existence seeks to fulfill itself in identity. This trait appears particularly in the most decisive acts of life: in the foundation of a family or of a community, in a dialogue that actualizes what I called earlier two" words of existence," or again in the acceptance of destiny. These events always unite those whom they affect, but one has to be very released, *gelassens* to respond properly to what destiny sends. Eckhart suggests an example to explain this: consider what happens in conversation. Through your words a clearance of understanding opens up which points towards the word of existence murmured in all that you say or do. But the event of such an opening is the work of neither you nor me. The " we " is not the achievement of the " I " or of the " you," rather it comes to be of its own accord. When it occurs there 'is' nothing else besides itself. In such moments two existences are determined as identical: identical in the *geWU.rke,* that is, in the event. When applied to the realm of deification this scheme shows man living no longer ' with' God but ' in ' him:

> God is not found in distinction. When the soul reaches the original image [of which it is .a reflection] and finds itself alone in it, then it finds God. Finding itself and finding God is one single process, outside of time. As far as it penetrates into him, it is identical with God ... not included, nor united, but more: identical· (Pf. p. 85, 36 f.).

> Identical is the event as God begets me as himself and begets himself as me. He begets me as his essential being and as his nature. There is one life .and one essential being and one work there (DW I, p. 109, 9 f.) .

• In Aristotle *energeia* signifies neither " agent " nor "effect," but action inasmuch as it produces the effect, >Operation in progress. Aristotle, *De Anima,* III, 7, 431 a *5,* transl. R. D. Hicks, Amsterdam *1965,* p. 139 f.

The ground of the soul and the ground of God are one single essential being (Pf. p. 467, 15).

Eckhart wants to insist so much on this energetic identity between God and man that he does not hesitate to accumulate adjectives against all customary usage: *ein einic ein ungeschieden* (DWI, p. 1), one unique unity without difference. The true nobility of the ground of the soul lies in that a released man becomes the locus where the energetic identity of God, of himself and of the world produces itself. The universe is genuinely 'universe,' that is, turned towards the One, only in a released man. Eckhart repeats as a kind of axiom:

All that is in God is God (DW I, p. *56,* 8) ;
In God, no creature is more noble than the other (DWI, p. *55,* 4);
In God, there is nothing but God (Pf. p. 83, 17) ;
What is in the first, is the first (LW V, p. 37, 8);
What is in the One is the One (LW I, p. *55,* fl).

These propositions can be read with reference to the theory of the preexistence of all things in God, or the theory of the divine ideas. But to be content with such a Neoplatonist reading of Meister Eckhart would mean to auscultate the letter of his sermons, unmindful of releasement, which remains the existential condition for the understanding of Eckhart's ontology. He always comes back to this necessity of abandoning both human and divine *eigenschaft* (property, selfhood, individuality) :

I wondered recently if I should accept or desire anything from God. I shall consider this carefully, for if I accepted something from God, I would be inferior to God like a serf, and he, in giving, would be like a lord. But in eternal life, such should not be our relation (DW I, p. llfl, 6f.) .

Eternal life means that man may live again, here and now, out of his ground, and that releasement may accomplish itself, so that God, man, and the world play out their identity. [10] Man's

[10] *Dies alles ist ein Spi,el, das sick die Gottheit macht,*
Sie hat Die Kreatur um ihretwilln erdacht.
All this is a play that the Godhead gives itself / It has conceived the creature for its own sake. Angelus Silesius, *op. cit.,* p. 45.

nobility makes him be the locus of the unity of God, man, and the world. Such identity is already in me, not in germ, but in totality, exactly in the same way as God is in me: not according to his effigy, but in totality.

The difficulty in reading Meister Eckhart arises because such a bold cataphatism is mixed, as we shall see, with a no less bold apophatism. Classing Meister Eckhart exclusively among the defenders of either the first or the second of these intellectual attitudes results in missing the very core of his thought. On this matter, it is doubtlessly prudent to speak of the "dialectic" of Meister Eckhart. [11] The loss of the origin now appears more clearly: if God were to be represented as a lord, " and I, inferior to God, like a serf," then the classic metaphysical titles such as prime analogate, supreme being, first cause, etc., would apply. But, Eckhart continues," such should not be our relation." What, then should be our relation? Pure identity, not difference. It is perhaps this anarchic element that the officers of the Inquisition sensed in Eckhart. They were obviously unable to grasp his teaching, and they certainly did not share the slightest bit of Eckhart's spiritual experience. Eckhart was perfectly right when he accused them of" short and imbecilic intelligence " [12]–so much so that the Bull of condemnation had to resort to literal distortions. But these judges probably had an instinct that sensed what I call the principle of anarchy in Eckhart. Perhaps they even sensed that this principle is indeed harmful, for instance for institutions. Which institution can do without some kind of First, be it an authority or an ideal? Likewise the hidden anarchy may be the reason for the unforeseeable and provocative behaviour of some Zen

Der Mensch hat eher nicht vollkomme Seligkeit
Bis dass die Einheit hat verschluckt die Anderheit.
Man has no perfect happiness *I* Until unity has swallowed up otherness. *Ibid.,* p. *55.*

[11] Cf. Maurice de Gandillac, "La ' dialectique ' de Maitre Eckhart," in *La Mystique rhenane,* Paris 1963, pp. 59-94.

[12] Gabriel Thery, "Edition critique des pieces relatives au proces d'Eckhart" in *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et litteraire du Moyen Age,* I (1926/27) p. 205; see similar epithets *ibid.* p. 196 and p. 248.

masters. Man's nobility tolerates neither lord nor master above him. A contemporary Marxist concludes from this that " Eckhart has claimed, at least in theory, the treasures alienated in heaven as man's own goods." [13] Without making him into a theoretician of the medieval peasant upheavals, however, one can say 1at least that Eckhart's type of thought does away with the very representation of a hierarchy-certainly in the ontological sense and perhaps in the social sense. I should say that the thrust of his argument is never ' indicative,' pointing towards degrees of being, but ' imperative,' pointing towards degrees of existential development. Indicative thought treats of substances, and by stressing their independence and sufficiency in being, it assigns to man his place within the universal order. Such a thought is unable to grasp Eckhart's teaching of identity and identification. Imperative thought, on the other hand, addresses the hearer in his way of being; it is protreptic. There is thus an ontological meaning to the literary form chosen by Meister Eckhart, preaching. It is not accidental that he was a preacher, quite as it is not accidental that language in Zen Buddhism takes the form of oral instruction or conversation. Such language urges our freedom to commit itself upon a path that remains unthinkable to representational metaphysics. As we shall now see, this path does not stop with the identity with God. It actually leads beyond God.

IV. *Pure Nature*

The fourth thesis in Eckhart's program was " the purity of the divine nature." God's nature is often called the Godhead. "God and Godhead," Eckhart says," are as distinct as heaven and earth" (Pf. 180, 15). It is in the name of the strictness of releasement that Eckhart criticizes the pretension of the supreme being to the rank of the origin. The supreme being has still a 'why,' namely all other beings. The God entirely deprived of a 'why' is pure nothingness. As I quoted earlier,

[18] Ernst Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum,* Frankfurt 1968, p. 94. Cf. H. Ley, *Geschichte der Aufklarung und des Atheismus,* I, Berlin 1966, pp. 357-444.

"God acts in nothingness" *(unwesene).* It is perhaps here that the parallel with Zen Buddhism is most obvious. Perfect releasement leads into pure nothingness. The Zen student, Dogen says, " passes entirely beyond the stage of the infinity of consciousness and attains and abides in the stage of nothingness." Let me simply render here some notes taken at Deshimaru's *mondos* (sessions of questions and answers) on this last step of the way of releasement.

Nothingness means forgetfulness: of things and of oneself, and even of zazen. Nothingness also lies beyond the opposition between being and non-being. Nothingness does not mean absence of truth, nor even absence of error; rather the mind lets errors be what they are and is indifferent to truth. Nothingness is neither sacred nor profane, it has no religious connotation. The sense of the holy is incompatible with pure nothingness. Nothingness means total privation of forms as well as fullness of forms at the same time, that is, all things are one in nothingness. The genuine Zen experience is the discovery of nothingness at the very heart of all that is pre.sent. It is also the discovery of the seed from which all thinking and knowledge arises. But no thought and no knowledge can reach it, as no thought can reach us in our unborn condition. Another word for nothingness is thus birthlessness. One master reportedly told his disciples: " If you can tell me what pure nothingness is you get thirty blows with the stick; and if you cannot tell me what it is you will also get thirty blows." Does Zen Buddhism think the absolute nothingness which in the Western tradition has remained unthinkable? One may doubt this, for the experience of nothingness here leads man back " among the drunkards and the beggars " : " Carrying a gourd he goes out into the market; leaning against a stick he comes home. He is found in company of wine-bibbers and butchers; he and they are all converted into Buddhas." [14]

If we lose sight of the *practioal* core of Zen we get irreversibly lost in abstract considerations of ontological and moral meanings

[14] D. T. Suzuki, <Yf· *cit.,* p. 876.

of nothingness: that is, forms of negating being or forms of negating purpose in action. The same is true with Meister Eckhart: outside the practice of releasement his statements about man's return into the pure nature of God receive a monistic ring which would make them sound either atheistic, as in Nietzsche's view,[15] or idealistic as in Hegel's.[16] In other words, active releasement is the practical *a priori* for any correct understanding of both Zen and Eckhart.

The principle of anarchy which governs the way of releasement is probably best expressed in those passages where Eckhart states that the pure nature of God is without a why, *sunder warumbe,* and that he who wants to penetrate into this pure nature must himself live without why (e.g. DWI, p. 90, 12).[17] Whoever has abandoned himself entirely and ' lets ' himself live without an *arcM* and a why is not motivated by any exterior inducement, not even God:

> Why do you love God?-I do not know, because of God.-,-Why do you love the truth?-Because of the truth.-Why do you love justice?-Because of justice.-Why do you love goodness?-Because of goodness.-Why do you live?-My word! I do not know! But I am happy to live (DW II, p. 27 I f.).

God is, man lives, things subsist and perish-all this without a why. Eckhart expressed this in multiple ways. His meditation on the why points beyond God as an origin. God, man,

[15] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* #!il9!il, transl. W. Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York 1974, p. !il35.

[16] Frank Von Baader remarks in his diary *(Siimdiche Werke,* ed. F. Hoffman, Leipzig, 1851-1860, vol. XV, p. 159): "Very often, at Berlin, I was in the company of Hegel. One day I read him some texts of Meister Eckhart, an author of whom he knew only the name. He was so delighted that he gave before me an entire course devoted to Meister Eckhart. At the end he also confided to me: ' Here we have found at last what we were seeking '," quoted by I. Degenhardt, *Studien zum Wandel des Eckhart-Bilde9,* Leiden, 1967, p. 114.

[17] *Die Ros' ist ohn' warum, sie bliihet,*
Sie acht't nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht ob man sie siehet.
The rose is without why, it flowers because it flowers / It pays no heed to itself, asks not if it is seen, A. Silesius, *op. cit.,* p. 35.
Martin Heidegger comments on this verse by claiming the authority of Meister Eckhart: *Der Satz vom Grund,* Pfiillingen, 1957, pp. 68-72.

and the world are considered in their anarchic emanation *(uzbruch, Ausbruch* or *uzvluz, Ausftuss)* where they "bubble forth" [18] from the pure nature, the Godhead, without a why.

What is the sense of a quest which seeks to transcend even God as the origin of all that there is? The metaphysician will object that beyond God, the highest being, no origin can be thought. But are the new birth and releasement thinkable as long as the excellence of God is in this way objectified? If God is represented as the duplicate beyond or within man, that is, as the Perfect above our imperfection, the divine birth can only be represented by sacrificing either identity to difference (God as the partner of the soul, Pietism) , or difference to identity (God as the oceanic substance which swallows up the soul, Pantheism) . Meister Eckhart, however, maintains both identity and difference. He attempts to think the origin prior to the manifestation of the threefold. To do so, he turns towards man as that being who needs only to come back to himself for the question of the origin to be raised. There is no other path

[18] Eckhart does call the Godhead ' origin,' *ursprunc,* it is true, but in the very literal sense of "primitive (ur-) springing" (from the verb *springen,* to spring). Another Middle-High-German form, today obsolete, was *ursprinc,* effervescence, efflorescence. The idea is always that of a kind of eruption. In Eckhart's Latin works the equivalent expressiO'lls are *bullitio* and *ebullitfo.* The first of these terms refers to the boiling within the Godhead before God, man and the world emanate, it refers to the Life before life, in which I already was before I came to be. The second, *ebullitio,* indicates the boiling-over of the archetypes from the Godhead, that is, the emanation of all created things from their primitive ground.

> 'Life ' means a kind of seething in which a thing
> ferments and first pours itself into itself, all
> that it is into all that it is, before spilling
> over and pouring itself outside (LW II, p. 22, 3 f.).

Die Gottheit is.t ein Brunn, aus ihr kommt alles her,
Und liiuft auch wieder hin, darum ist sie auch ein Meer.
The Godhead is a well, everything comes from it, / and everything runs again unto it: hence it is also a sea, Angelus Silesius, *op. cit.,* p. *52.*

Wenn ich in Gott vergeh, so komm ich wieder hin,
Wo ich in Ewigkeit vor mir geJwesen bin.
When I lose myself in God, I return / to where I have been from all eternity, before me. *Ibid.,* p. 72.

than that of releasement which can overcome the representation of God as the highest being. A person will be released only when he ceases devoting and dedicating himself with attachment to enterprises big or small, good or evil. Let God be, stop seeking him, abandon God, and then you will find him. Only he who does not seek will find.[19] There is no higher attestation of God than this diffidence.

Leaving things, leaving God, living without a why: these teachings of Meister Eckhart surely sound subversive. Indeed they are literally a subversion, an overthrow (*vertere)* from the foundation (sub-). Why the world? Why God? Why man? Why identity? They are, Meister Eckhart answers, without a " why." For traditional metaphysics the thought of a threefold interplay of God, man and the world which enacts itself for no reason is sheer folly. But Eckhart charges that the intellectual quest for unshakable foundations keeps itself aloof from any genuine disclosure as it is attached to the" why," to the *raison d'etre* of things. One imagines what happens to the scholastic constructions when unexpectedly a preacher comes along who unveils the nothingness of foundations; the scholastic mind is seized with dizziness. The God whom this other way of thinking annihilates in his function of foundation is perhaps indeed the God of western Christianity. If you seek God for the sake of a foundation, Eckhart says, if you look for God even for the sake of God himself, then:

> you behave as though you transformed God into a candle in order to find something with it; and when one has found what one looks for, one throws away the candle (DW I, p. 69, 2 f.).

Meister Eckhart only draws the ultimate consequence of letting-be. What is, let it be. Everything could as well not be, but since it is, let it be. God, man, and the world could not be, but

[19] In Angelus Silesius, *Gelassenheit* receives the same meaning:

Gelassenheit faht Gott; Gott aber selbst zu lassen
Ist ein' Gelassenheit, die wenig Menschen fassen.

Releasement grasps God, but to release God himself / is a releasement that few people grasp. *Op. cit.,* p. 42.

since they are, let them be. But the mind is invited to move beyond them. [20]

As the *arche*, the origin as wherefrom (represented by the words " since they are ") , is without a why, so, too, the *telos,* the origin as whereto, (represented by the words "let them be") is without a why. For Eckhart, such thought leads man into the desert, which is prior to God, man, and the world.

I have spoken of a power in the mind. In its first manifestation, it does not apprehend God. It does not apprehend him in so far as he is good, nor in so far as he is the truth. It penetrates into the ground, it pursues and burrows, and it apprehends God in his oneness .and in his desert *(einoede);* it apprehends God in his wilderness *(wiistunge)* .and in his own ground (DWI, p. 171, 12 f.).

The desert is not fertile in anything: likewise the Godhead is arid, it does not create anything. In the desert everything begins only: but God disappears. The desert is the vast solitude, there is no place for two in the desert. The opposition between a Creator and a creature vanishes. In the desert entreaties are of no avail, there is no opposite of man towards whom he might raise his hands. In the desert, the wind and the sand wipe out the traces of the caravans; the steps of God disappear together with those of man and the world.

The desert is full of seeds but they do not sprout there. The Godhead is a house, Eckhart says, full of people but from which no one as of yet has gone out. Let the dwellers go out into the street and they will be hailed: " God," " Eckhart " ....

God becomes; where all creatures enunciate God, there God becomes. When I still stood in the ground, the soil, the river and the source of the Godhead, no one asked me where I was going or what I was doing. There was no one there to question me. But

[20] *Wo ist mein Aufenthalt? Wo ich und du nicht stehen.*
Wo ist mein letztes End ', in welches ich soll gehen?
Da woman keines findt. Wo soll ich dann nun hin?
Ich muss noch iiber Gott in eine Wii.ste ziehn.
Where is my stay? Where you and I are not. / Where is the last end to which I should tend? / Where one finds none. Where then shall I go? / I must move still higher than God, into a desert. Angelus Silesius, *op. cit.,* p. 61.

when I went out by dehiscence, all creatures cried out: " God ". If someone were to ask me: "Brother Eckhart, when did you leave home? " this would indicate that I must previously have been inside. It is thus that all creatures speak of God. And why do they not speak of the Godhead? Everything that is in the Godhead is one, and of this nothing can be said (Pf. p. 181, I f.) .

Whoever speaks of God intends to speak of his most sublime counterpart, that is, of a being opposable to other beings. He invokes him as the one who saves, the one who judges ... , always as .the Other. But to speak of the Godhead is to think of a pre-originary origin, prior to all opposition; it is to think of God's "pure nature," his "concealed intimacy," his "abysmal," " limpid," " hidden, anarchic essence." As in Zen, properly speaking the pre-originary origin is not. The purity of the divine nature is sheer nothingness. Indeed, if the anarchic origin were to be, its being would make it opposable to other beings. If the sermon *"Beati Pauperes Spiritu"* still calls the negated *are-he* "first cause" this only indicates Eckhart's embarrassment in being unable to express a non-metaphysical thought in a metaphysically fixed language:

When I still stood in my first cause, I had no God, I was cause of myself. . . . But when by free will I went out and received my created being, then I had a God. Indeed, before there were creatures, God was not yet God, but he was what he was (DW II, p. 492, *3* f.).

He was what he was: the anarchic origin is radically unknowable. The expre.ssion " I was cause of myself '" is very strong: according to the traditional teaching God alone is *e-ausa sui.* Here it is applied to man. Let me conclude by continuing the quote from this famous sermon which suggests perfectly the ultimate stage of the loss of the origin on the way of releasement:

This is why I pray to God to rid me of God, for my essential being *(min weserllich wesen)* is above God in so far as we comprehend God as the principle of creatures. Indeed, in God's own being, where God is raised above all being and all distinctions, I was myself, I willed myself, and knew myself to create this man [that I

am]. Therefore I am cause of myself according to my being which is eternal, but not according to my becoming which is temporal. Therefore also I am unborn, and according to my unborn being I can never die. According to my unborn being I have always been, am now and shall eternally remain. What I am by my [temporal] birth is to die and be annihilated, for it is mortal; therefore with time it must pass away. In my [eternal] birth all things were born, and I was cause of myself as well as of all things. If I had willed it, neither I nor any things would be. And if I myself were not, God would not be either: that God is God, of this I am a cause. If I were not, God would not be God. There is, however, no need to understand this.

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BOOK REVIEW

C. S. LEWIS: THE RECENT LITERATURE

When C. S. Lewis died on November 22, 1963, very few people noticed. Events of the same day in Dallas engulfed all other news. Nevertheless, Lewis, though dead for more than a decade, has not been forgotten. Indeed, a resurgence of interest in his writings has taken place in recent years. Many of these writings have a lasting quality far beyond anything which academic theologians might have predicted.

Of the secondary literature on Lewis, much of the best has been provided by literary critics-a chastening thought for theologians. Charles Moorman's splendidly titled book, *The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians* (University of Florida Press, 1966), though now a decade old, remains a perceptive treatment of a central theme in Lewis (and others whom Moorman treats: Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers, T. S. Eliot, J. R. R. Tolkien). More recently, Corbin Carnell has published an excellent study, *Bright Shadow of Reality: C. S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect* (Eerdmans, 1974). His is a study of one central theme-that of *Sehnsucht* or romantic longing-in Lewis's writings. Despite the fact that some insightful treatments of Lewis have been available, however, his thought has seldom been done justice and has sometimes been badly characterized.

Thus, for example, when Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper's *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (Collins and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) appeared, the reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* (July 12, 1974) persistently described Lewis as a fundamentalist. Whether fundamentalism is or is not a good theological system is beside the point here. Rather, the point is simply the astonishing ignorance either of Lewis's writings or of fundamentalism which would permit such a characterization. In recent years, happily, some books have appeared which begin to do justice to Lewis's thought, leaving future reviewers without excuse.

The biography by Green and Hooper is itself of value in certain respects. Green was a friend of Lewis for many years and Hooper was Lewis's personal secretary at the time of his death. The product of their joint labor will no doubt be "definitive" as a biography for some years to come, though it is, in fact, rather perfunctory and almost wholly lacking in the beauty which characterizes Lewis's own prose. The authors follow rather slavishly the outline of Lewis's own *Surprised by Joy* and display an attitude toward their subject little short of reverential. Nevertheless, the book

does contain material which it is difficult to find elsewhere: chiefly, lengthy excerpts from some of Lewis's unpublished letters and an insider's account of Lewis's marriage late in life to the American divorcee, Joy Davidman Gresham. The latter is especially important, since Joy undoubtedly had an important influence on some of Lewis's later writings. It was her death which precipitated the searing power of *A Grief Observed;* her help which brought *Till We Have Faces* to fruition after its theme had been with Lewis for years and her person which served in some ways as a model for the character of Orual in that same book; their marriage which made Lewis's chapter on *Eros* in *The Four Loves* so much more lively (and earthy) than his earlier discussion of marriage in *Mere Christianity.* These three books-A *Grief Observed, Till We Have Faces,* and *The Four Loves*- all follow Lewis's marriage, and perhaps we owe it to Joy that these are the works in which Lewis most clearly articulates " the tether and pang of the particular," the pain of our creaturely condition, and the way in which grace wounds our nature in order to fulfill it.

Thus, although the biography by Green and Hooper might have been far better than it is, it can at least be said to be authoritative, and it does provide some important and relatively unattainable material. Lewis, however, would have been the first person to recommend that we pay primary attention to an author's writings rather than his life. Several books, one of them very recent, attempt to do just that.

I

Paul Holmer's *C. S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (Harper & Row, 1976) is neither as cursory nor as light as it looks. It is also puzzling in certain ways. A first reading may leave one unclear about what precisely Holmer intends to argue with respect to Lewis-and unclear also about the audience at which Holmer is aiming the book. He seems to be saying that Lewis eschewed-if he was not hostile toward-second-order reflection in the " about " mode, that he saw little need for theories about religious matters, that he emphasized knowledge by acquaintance *(connattre)* rather than by description *(savoir),* that he stressed the development of virtuous habits of behavior, and that he was in some ways like Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. It makes for a puzzling collection of assertions, but it is worth the effort to understand Holmer-not only because his is the first book on Lewis by a serious and reasonably well-known theologian, but also because he has in fact seen something very important about Lewis's writings.

Let us set aside quickly some of the puzzling features in Holmer's treatment: the comparisons with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein seem, at best, strained and strange-needing to be explicated in far more detail if they are to be helpful. Holmer is on more certain ground when he alludes to

Dr. Johnson, Plato, and Aristotle; he might have added Augustine, Richard Hooker, and Newman. These are the thinkers in whose company one ought surely to place Lewis. It is also a little disconcerting to be given a book about Lewis's "manner and mode of thought" (p. 96)-thus, a book about methodology the point of which is that Lewis had little concern with methodology. But perhaps Holmer might agree that this is unfortunate; one senses that he himself might prefer to have us read Lewis rather than simply talk about Lewis. Perhaps he felt that the contemporary climate of opinion left him little alternative: in order to defend Lewis's departures from contemporary modes of theological reflection, he himself would have to risk being infected by them. Finally, there is an unfortunate lack of clarity about the sense in which Lewis did or did not espouse "theories" about all sorts of things. (One senses that Holmer as a Wittgensteinian has more cards than he is playing here; indeed, he says as much in a footnote on page 72.) The reader who knows only the first half of Lewis's *Miracles-and* there are such readers-is likely to be puzzled by Holmer's repeated assertions that Lewis eschews theories about topics like "rationality." But then, Holmer's great virtue as an expositor of Lewis is that he *does* kno:w more than the first half of *Miracles.* He has done what is necessary in order to understand Lewis: read all there is by him, including the literary criticism. It is not unimportant that Lewis's two most straightforwardly apologetic works, *Miracles* and *The Problem of Pain,* do not bulk large in Holmer's discussion. That is, in my judgment, a sign that Holmer is on to what many have missed in Lewis. He knows that other works are more important for understanding Lewis: *Till We Have Faces,* some of Lewis's short essays (such as "Tranposition "), *The Abolition of Man,* and some of Lewis's literary criticism.

What is it, then, that Holmer argues with respect to Lewis? A careful reading will find two major themes which are inter-related in Holmer's interpretation. There is, *first,* the business about theories. "Lewis is," Holmer writes, "singularly free of theories" (p. 18). Now, Lewis himself nowhere puts it quite that way. Holmer does on two occasions (pp. 24, 102) cite a passage from *The Case for Christianity* in which Lewis says that "the theories are not themselves the thing you're asked to accept"; however, Lewis says this with specific reference to theories of the atonement, and I do not believe the comment has as wide-ranging a significance as Holmer implies. In fact, Holmer himself can write that a "new epistemology" is emerging in Lewis's literature (p. 114).

If we try to make Holmer's point precise, we shall find that he states it in a variety of ways. (I) Lewis permits "views of life" and "general outlooks," but these are different from theories, points of view, and hypotheses (p. 23). (2) Knowledge of some things-especially, human nature-cannot be acquired in the (scientific) form of general laws (pp. 25-27). (3) Theories cut us off from actual experience of life, from savoring

and tasting reality. They permit us to talk "about" experience, but in the very process of doing so force us to abstract ourselves from experience itself (pp. 37, 63). (4) Theories, points of view, and hypotheses paralyze us. They are topics for endless discussion, always involving uncertainty. We seem always required to settle one more critical issue before we can believe at all (pp. Q3, 100). (5) There is no single, normative way of talking about the world-no single " literal language that reproduces the structures of the world." That is, there is no privileged way to talk " about " the world (p. 59) .

If we try to organize Holmer's formulations, we get something like this: The problem with theories is not simply their generality. (After all, Holmer's Lewis doesn't mind views of life, which are certainly general enough.) The problem with theories is that they are reductive, and, hence, seldom do justice to our experience. Experience involves multiplicity, and the theorist's passionate drive toward the simplicity of unity may therefore fail to do justice to our experience. Lewis always drives us back to that experience. (Do we catch here some hint of the medievalist who knows that Ptolemy's theory was not disproved but found too cumbersome-i. e., not simple enough?) Here, too, Holmer's point about the paralyzing effect of theories is relevant. We may come to imagine that, if the theory cannot make room for some aspect of our experience, we must give up the experience rather than the theory. We may permit talk in the "about" mode to kill our actual experience of reality. Experience involves multiplicity; hence, Holmer's other point: there may be no single, normative way to talk about what we do and feel. Perhaps Holmer has a hidden agenda here; he may be turning Lewis into an ordinary language philosopher. I think that would be a mistake, though the mistake ought not obscure the accuracy of Holmer's reading of Lewis. It would be closer to the truth to find here some remnants of Lewis the philosophical idealist, a stage of his intellectual development which, contrary to what Holmer implies, he never fully left behind. The many languages which are necessary in place of one normative language are not, for Lewis, "language games "; rather, they are the idealist's " modes of experience."

We can illustrate this first point of Holmer's by discussing a topic of great importance in Lewis: longing for joy, or what Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* cails *Sehnsucht* and in *The Pilgrim's Regress* "sweet desire." One wishes, indeed, that Holmer might have discussed this theme in detail; however, Carnell's careful discussion of romantic longing certainly does Lewis justice. *Sehnsucht* is in some ways Lewis's version of the Augustinian theme of the heart restless until it rests in God. Lewis is referring to the experience of romantic longing, a longing which can be awakened in one by almost anything in our world. For Lewis the experience was first evoked by nature and by Norse mythology. But the precise causes are relatively unimportant; it is the experience that counts.

Lewis says this desire is a longing that overcomes the self, carries one out of one's self. It indicates a lack, a desire for something not possessed. Yet, paradoxically, the lack is better than any possession; this wanting is preferable to any having, this sickness better than any health. Thus, the right kind of lovely autumn day may suddenly carry me out of my self, overcoming me with a wave of desire for burning leaves, football, and carefree days of boyhood. It would not be altogether impossible for me to try to recapture those days, but to do so would be fundamentally mistaken according to Lewis's account of *Sehnsucht.* For whether I recognize it or not the longing is for something other than burning leaves, football, and carefree days. The desire is not *for* them though it was awakened *through* them. And when one reaches that point, the question becomes: What *is* the object of this desire?

It would be possible here to interpose a theory. Lewis would not object to such a suggestion. What he objects to is the interposition of a theory which does not permit us to seek an answer in our experience. Let me try out various possibilities and see whether this desire is satisfied. I can burn leaves if I like. Perhaps I can take a few days off work and recapture the beauty of autumn days. I can daydream about or indulge in a little extracurricular sexual experience.

The only requirement is that I be honest. And if I am, Lewis believes, the verdict will be clear: whatever it was that I desired in the moment of romantic longing, it was not this. Experience is an honest thing, Lewis says. And if we will only be honest in return, it will render an honest verdict upon all our attempts to satisfy this longing with which we were born. We will be forced to conclude that we were made with a longing which no natural object or experience can satisfy. We are made with a longing for something or someone never fully given in our experience. Romantic longing is a sign, a pointer toward we know not what, the Other beyond all imagining.

Thus we are led, Lewis thinks, to God. Just as the fact of hunger indicates that we are beings made to be nourished by foods (though not necessarily that on any given occasion we will get the food we need), even so the fact of romantic longing indicates the existence of that One who alone could satisfy such desire (though, again, it does not necessarily mean that we shall find Him.)

But someone may object that there is a mammoth assumption thinly concealed here. Lewis's entire discussion of *Sehnsucht* presupposes that our world (and our nature) is not absurd and futile. He never considers the possibility that we might find ourselves the possessors of a desire which is in vain, a desire for which no possible satisfaction exists. And, of course, such an objection would be true. Lewis says-following St. Thomas, who was following Aristotle-that Nature makes nothing in vain. Well, then, ought we not perhaps consider all the other theories which might explain

the experience-naturalistic, psychological, and so forth? Yes, but not if they refuse to accept the experience of romantic longing on its own terms, not if they refuse to know it " from the inside," as Holmer and Lewis would say. It will not work, Lewis writes in "Transposition," to try to prove to a man who has never experienced love that it is different from lust. Knowing only the " lower " experience, he can do little more than try to understand the " higher " in terms of what he knows. Theoretical argument is superfluous. If he has experienced love-and is not in the grip of a theory-he will know the difference. If he has not, no amount of argument can be expected to change his mind. Even so with romantic longing. If he has experienced it and tried out the various suggested answers, he will see the truth. If he has not ... well, we need not let his theoretical uncertainly deprive us of our experience.

This is Holmer's first point in interpreting Lewis. There is a kind of knowing which is knowing from the inside, which is not in the " about " mode. This knowing initiates us into the multiplicity of experience, and we may believe ourselves genuinely to know a good deal about ourselves and our world even if we cannot encompass everything we know in a single satisfactory theory. And yet experience speaks with many voices. If we are not to test our experience by means of hypotheses and theories, how shall we test it?

Here we come to the second theme in Holmer's interpretation of Lewis: the importance of the achievement of virtue. According to Holmer, Lewis makes a case for " the forgotten strategy of achieving the capacities and abilities that rightly belong to our common human nature " {p. 7). Wisdom is not imparted by means of didactic instruction in points of view. We have to become wise. And this is part of becoming fully human. We have to become competent at finding our way around our world, sensitive in our understanding of that world {p. 80).

Holmer is stressing the importance of moral education. Here again he sirems to be absolutely on target as an interpreter of Lewis, far more so than almost anyone else who has written on Lewis. This is not to say that his treatment is without flaws. Lewis does not exactly plead the " massive unanimity of the practical everyday reasoning of ordinary people " {p. 58)-except in *Mere Christianity.* In *The Abolition of Man* Lewis explicitly rejects Hooker's argument from common consent. And it is difficult to imagine Lewis saying, even in Holmer's qualified sense, that " by paying attention to the subject one discovers the object" {p. 104). Lewis would be more likely to say that one becomes a subject only by *not* paying attention to oneself, that is by focussing on what is outside the self. He would go on to say, with Holmer, that one will see what is outside the self rightly only after one has become a competent, sensitive, personal subject.

These minor flaws do not detract. Lewis is seeking to inculcate virtue

in his readers. Once we see that we will read Lewis's works {despite their differing *genres)* with new insight. The Chronicles of Narnia are more than just good stories. And that " more " is not simply Christian teaching. In fact, the Chronicles are understood far better if we think of them as functioning "indirectly" (as Holmer, in his Kierkegaardian moods, puts it) to elicit virtuous habits of behavior. A father is not likely to argue his son into believing that death in a good cause can be noble. Here too argument is superfluous. If the son is virtuous, he will agree. If he is not, argument will fail. How, then, inculcate such virtue in the young? Indirectly. Not by teaching rules, but by reading them stories in which they hear of messages such as Roonwit the Centaur sends to Tirian, last of the kings of Narnia. Roonwit lies dying, killed in an unsuccessful attempt to get reinforcements for Tirian, but he sends to Tirian this final message: Tirian is to remember that " all worlds draw to an end and that noble death is a treasure which no one is too poor to buy."

Furthermore, once we realize with Holmer the importance to Lewis of the indirect inculcation of virtue we may begin to appreciate how seldom he actually engages in mere argument and how often he appeals to our imaginative powers, seeking to broaden our vision and help us see " from the inside " what certain experiences are like. Lewis is not teaching rules; he is initiating his readers into the fullness of human nature and the multiplicity of human experience.

These are Holmer's two major themes in interpreting Lewis. The connection between them is essential, though, and needs to be stated. Put most simply the connection lies in the Platonic teaching that virtue is knowledge. Holmer might have made this clearer than he does, but the connection is certainly there. Lewis has, he writes, " seen the close connections between what people see and know and how they live " (p. 64). The capabilities of the self determine the account the self gives of the world (p. 89).

Thus, when Lewis sends us back to our experience with a kind of confidence that it will not mislead us, he sends us back in the hope that he has also elicited from us some of the capacities-the vision-necessary to see that experience in a new light. Not all experience stands on the same level. Only the wise man, he whose vision has been broadened, whose appetite disciplined, can be trusted as an interpreter of our world. For only such a man is fully human.

Lewis is a forebear of Iris Murdoch in her insistence that moralists should spend more time discussing the way by which moral virtue can be elicited. One important feature of Lewis's writings which Holmer himself seems to miss is the stress on self-giving which permeates almost everything Lewis ever wrote. To achieve such a spirit of self-giving will require what Murdoch has described as an attack on the " fat, relentless ego " which seeks to aggrandize itself. This is the task of moral education, or, more broadly, initiation into humanity.

Holmer's picture of Lewis is important not only because it is accurate but also because it tends to reverse a common stereotype. Lewis is often thought an excessively argumentative writer, a rationalist to the core. But Holmer has seen the other side, the side of Lewis which seeks to appeal to our imagination at least as much as our reason. This Lewis is distrustful of any argument which abstracts from our experience or seeks to reduce that experience to meet the demands of a theory. This Lewis recognizes that argument will often be fruitless if our partner in argument has not had the necessary experiences or fails to acknowledge them for what they are. This Lewis believes, therefore, that rational argument will be helpful only if we have first inculcated virtuous habits of behavior in ourselves and others. Only those who have been well brought up can usefully discuss certain matters. And Lewis's writings are an attempt to do several things at once: to broaden our vision, increase our virtue, and-in so doing-help us to see the world in a new (and Christian) way.

II

Holmer does not, as noted above, consider in any detail Lewis's discussions of romantic longing. This is related in general to Holmer's seeming disregard for the importance of Augustine in shaping Lewis's thought. And, indeed, on at least one occasion Holmer deprecates romanticism in a way Lewis would surely not have done (p. 112). This aspect of Lewis's thought has, however, been treated in detail by several literary critics. Carnell's work has already been mentioned. R. J. Reilly's *Romantic Religion* (University of Georgia Press, 1971) is a study of " the fusion of a certain literary form with a certain subject matter, the romantic manner applied to religious matter" (p. 1). Reilly discusses the romantic religion not only of Lewis but of three other men who were close friends of Lewis: Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien. His discussion of these men is exceptionally detailed, particularly with respect to Barfield.

The great strength of Reilly's book, the lengthy and amazingly clear discussion of Barfield's rather esoteric views, is also its weakness. For, despite his statement (p. 9) that he has tried to emphasize influences, it is clear that he sees Barfield as the pivotal figure behind the romantic religion of the other men. There is good reason to think that Barfield was in some degree influential in shaping Lewis's thought. However, the influence of Barfield on Lewis seems to be overstated and it mars Reilly's discussion.

It is impossible here to explicate the extraordinarily complex thought of Owen Barfield. Readers of *Surprised by Joy* will recall that, according to Lewis, Barfield was instrumental in bringing about one of the steps which led to his conversion. It was the" Great War," the ongoing argument with Barfield, which convinced Lewis, hitherto a philosophical realist, that our logic participates in the cosmic *logos* and that, therefore, philosophical

idealism was closer to the truth. For Lewis this became a station on the way to theism and, thence, Christianity. Barfield's own thought, however, combined his philological interests, idealism (especially Coleridge), and the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. At several places along this way (more than Reilly seems to realize) Lewis and Barfield were far from agreeing.

What Barfield took from Steiner Lewis never accepted. Barfield himself recognized this, as Lewis's letters, some of them unpublished, make clear. Barfield came to believe not simply in the evolution of human consciousness but in the gradual transformation of God's consciousness into man—his own esoteric interpretation of the incarnation. Reilly recognizes, but does not do justice to, the fact that such a far-reaching understanding of divine immanence was never acceptable to Lewis. And, though space does not permit proof here, the reason, I suggest, was that Lewis had a very firm grip on what it means to be a *creature.* It meant among other things, as he says in the Preface to *The Pilgrim's Regress,* that human beings were meant to be neither rational nor visceral but both. What Lewis believes, and what *Sehnsucht* points toward, is that the goal of creation is fellowship between creature and Creator. Fellowship is the goal, not transformation of God into man.

We can see this in another way if we consider Barfield's use of Coleridge's doctrine of creative imagination, a theme central to Reilly's discussion. For Coleridge the primary imagination is that by means of which we structure noumena in order to " create " the phenomenal world. Secondary imagination creates new meaning by generating new metaphors. Since the world we perceive is the product of (primary) imagination, it can be known only by the (secondary) imagination. Thus, all knowledge is, finally, metaphorical. Now, as Reilly recognizes, Lewis affirms the importance of secondary imagination; affirms, we might say, the importance of metaphor for knowing, without accepting what Barfield says about the primary imagination (p. fl18). For what Barfield says, in essence, is that, since our primary imagination " creates " the world, God is finally immanent mman.

This Lewis does not accept. He reserves primary imagination, it would seem, for God. Hence, our logic must participate in the divine *logos* in order to be valid, but this is more like Tolkien's concept of " subcreation " than it is Barfield's doctrine of the creative imagination. This means that for Lewis, as he says in *The Abolition of Man,* the wise man conforms himself to reality, a reality which is not the product of his creative imagination. Thus precisely in that book which most shows the influence of Barfield Lewis parts company with the anthroposophical elements in Barfield's thought. Man does not, like God or as God, create his world. He *can* do something like that, but the exercise of such freedom would be ontologically

disastrous. For in so doing he would cease to be man; cease, that is, to understand himself as creature.

Too much emphRllis on the influence of Barfield leads Reilly to misinterpret Lewis's thought in a variety of places. For example, he offers an interpretation of *Till We Hwve Faces* which though intriguing misses the themes of vicariousness and the wounding of nature by grace. In other words, the attempt to read Lewis's myth in the light of Barfield's metaphysic misses several central Lewis themes. In the same connection he interprets Lewis's myth of the Fall in terms of Barfield's thought rather than Augustine's, though Lewis is doing little more than restating Augustine at this point.

Similarly, it seems simply mistaken to say that "examination of Lewis's doctrinal work shows that the real man behind Lewis is, not unexpectedly, the same as the one behind Barfield: Coleridge" (p. 138). Reilly is beguiled by this into suggesting that Lewis takes over the Kant-Coleridge distinction between speculative and practical reason (p. 140). But Lewis's idealism is more Platonic than Kantian. It would be more correct to see the classical element in Lewis's thought in the way he thinks that speculative reason extends itself to become practical. It would be better still to return to Holmer here rather than to drive a wedge between speculative and practical reason as Reilly does. For Lewis it is the *connection* between pure reason and practical reason which is central. In order to "see" certain things, we have to be a certain sort of person. On this point Holmer rather than Reilly is to be trusted.

Reilly's book is very detailed and valuable for its treatment of other figures besides Lewis. If, however, one wishes simply to explore Lewis's notion of romantic longing, Carnell's *Bright Shadow of Reality* is more to be recommended. Like many books on Lewis, it has rather too much summary of the story of Lewis's life, a story which Lewis himself tells in *Surprised by Joy.* Nevertheless, it is a valuable study both in its delineation of the various elements in *Sehnsucht,* its discussion of influences on Lewis, and its interpretation of Lewis's fiction. Especially to be appreciated is Carnell's recognition that Lewis is more often presenting us with a vision than an argument, that "to awaken a desire for love and goodness-this was Lewis's purpose in almost everything he wrote" (p. 161). To understand *Sehnsucht* (and Lewis) we must remember the "feeling intellect" which reconciles the emotions and the reason and makes a whole man. Thus does Carnell the literary critic agree with Holmer the theologian about how best to read Lewis.

m

If I were to point to an unfinished agendum for interpreters of Lewis, it would be this: that we consider more carefully why it is that so much

of Lewis's effective theology comes in stories and imaginative literature (and why even his "straight" theology is, in fact, heavily dosed with imaginative use of metaphor) . We should do this not simply to latch on to the latest theological fad but rather because Lewis and Tolkien too were interested in the " narrative quality of experience " long before it ever became faddish among theologians.

Some of the reasons have already been hinted at above, but they need to be developed. What we see, Holmer suggests, depends on the sort of person we are, and virtuous habits of behavior cannot be beaten into anyone. They must be educed and cultivated indirectly. To this purpose stories are an excellent medium. More than that, the romantic longing which, Lewis thinks, characterizes all of us points toward a fulfillment never given in historical experience. This means that the Christian is always a pilgrim moving from past toward future, called to faithfulness in the present. His experience is unfinished, since he himself is only a character in a story the divine Author is telling. This means that stories, rather than a *Summa,* become an apt mode for theological reflection. Or, at least Lewis might say, a *Summa* ought always be left unfinished, a witness to that vision toward which it points but which it cannot capture.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Abingdon Press: *On Human Care: An Introduction to Ethics,* by Arthur J. Dyck. Pp. 189; *$5.50.*

American Academy of Religion Dissertation Series: *Doers of the Word: Towards a Fundamental Theology,* by John V. Apczynski. Pp. xii, 202; $6.00 paperbound.

Bellarmin: Evangile d'amour et de liberte, by Paul Dostaler. Pp. *550; $15.95.*

Society of Biblical Literature: *Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism,* by John Bogart. Pp. xi, 190; $4.50.

Blackwell: *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and the Brothers Karamazov,* by Steward Sutherland. Pp. 152; £.6.75.

Herder: *Zeit der Orden? Zur Mystik und Politik der Nat;hfolge,* by Johannes Metz. Pp. 101; 10.80DM. *Vorherbestimmung: Traditionelle Pradestinationslehre im Licht gegenwartiger Theologie,* by G. Kraus. Pp. 397; 74.00DM.

John Hopkins University Press: *The Hand of the Lor.d: A Reassessment of the Ark Narrative,* by Patrick D. Miller and J.M. Roberts. Pp. viii, 119; $11.00.

The Jewish Theological Seminary: *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy: 1555-1593,* by Kenneth R. Stow. Pp. 411; $25.00.

Kaiser. *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Schwesterlichkeit: Zur Emanzipation der Frau in Kirche und Gesellschaft,* by Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel. Pp. 72; 7.80DM.

Matthias-Griinewald: *Zur Theologie der christlichen Ehe,* by Walter Kasper. Pp. *95;* $2.SODM.

Les Presses de l'Universite de Montreal: *Bachelard ou le concept contre l'image,* by Jean-Pierre Roy. Pp. 243; $14.00 paperbound.

Oxford University Press: *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada,* by Robert T. Handy. Pp. 471; $23.30.

Patmos: *Gott Du unser Ich: Ein Gesprach uber Chr.istentum und Atheismus,* by J. Kuhlmann. Pp. 176; 14.00D.M.

Trinity University Press: *The Reflection of Theology in Literature: A Case Study in Theology and Culture,* by William Mallard. Pp. 269; $10.00.

Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht: *Praxis und Prinzipien der Sozialethik John Wesleys,* by M. Marquardt. Pp. 176; 34.00DM.