

PART IV

Holdíng On to Religion

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The Spiritual Icon

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[[CHAPTER TWELVE]]

Devil's Seed

And some will say that such teachings should not be uttered or written to the unlearned. To this I reply, if one may not teach the unlearned, then no one can teach or write. For we teach the unlearned so that from being unlearned they may become learned. If there were nothing new there would be nothing old. "Those who are well," says our Lord, "have no need of medicine" [Luke 5:31]. The physician is there to heal the sick. But if anyone misinterprets this saying, how can he help it who rightly teaches this saying, which is right?

BOOK OF DIVINE COMFORT

Specters of Heresy

The years of Eckhart's stay in Strasbourg coincided almost exactly with the demographic crisis of 1315–22 known to survivors as the Great Famine. Beginning with the ominous appearance of a new comet in November 1315, northern Europeans experienced a series of bitter, extended winters followed by severe and sustained spring and summer downpours. During the winter of 1315–16, the Baltic Sea froze over; two years later, subfreezing temperatures lasted from late November 1317 to April 1318. Widespread floods and windstorms during the warmer months devastated crops across the continent, leading to famine, uncontrollable inflation, malnutrition, epidemics, and massive starvation. Mortality rates surpassed those of any other time

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01 during the entire Middle Ages—except those of the cataclysmic Black Death
 02 thirty years later. Hordes of hungry, homeless beggars roamed the land,
 03 while theft and other crime skyrocketed. Chroniclers reported multiple
 04 cases of cannibalism and infanticide. Religious processions of barefoot, self-
 05 flagellating penitents pleaded with God to restore normal weather and pros-
 06 perity. Many people, invoking the 1315 comet and other celestial signs,
 07 believed that the days of the Last Judgment were at hand.

08 These were also the days of Meister Eckhart's popular sermons on the
 09 divine birth. While the master himself never once spoke in apocalyptic
 10 terms, surely some of his listeners felt a new sense of urgency in their own
 11 spiritual quests. Certainly, as is usually the case, the environmental crisis
 12 aggravated existing social tensions. Parish priests and other members of the
 13 secular clergy of Strasbourg renewed their campaign against beguines, once
 14 more pleading with their bishop, Johann I, to take action against the reli-
 15 gious women and their mendicant supporters. Johann, one of the earliest
 16 opponents of the religious women's movement, needed little convincing
 17 that something particularly dangerous was under way in his diocese. In Au-
 18 gust 1317, he published an impassioned condemnation of "so-called religious
 19 beguards and sisters [i.e., beguines]," some of whom he accused of belonging
 20 to the underground Free Spirit sect. Among the forty-two errors listed, the
 21 bishop began with the charge of pantheism, their claim that "God is every-
 22 where and this makes them perfect. . . . They say that a person can be so
 23 united with God that all his power, will, and activity is the same as God's."
 24 They believe, he continued, "that they are God by nature without distinc-
 25 tion," and "that with God they created all things." And since "they are so free
 26 in the spirit, whatever they do with the body, they do not sin."

27 The resemblance of such statements to Eckhart's own preaching is un-
 28 mistakable, yet Johann never once refers to the influence of the famed Do-
 29 minican or any of his fellow friars. Some modern historians have suggested
 30 that the bishop even sought out Eckhart's help in dealing with the beguines
 31 in particular. Still, the master must have been struck by the similarity to
 32 many of his own words, particularly when he heard that the accused heretics
 33S "likened themselves truly by nature to Christ himself" and claimed that
 34N they should trust their "heart" or "interior instinct" more than anything

else. According to Bishop Johann, many of these "dangerous people" considered the Christianity of their day "utter foolishness," rejecting the sacraments, fasting, and petitionary prayer, as well as purgatory and hell. All such individuals, he ordered, should immediately stop wearing penitential garb, forfeit all possessions, and live conventionally pious lives or face excommunication. All laypeople were to stop listening to their songs and to their preaching.

Was there truly such an organized sect as the Free Spirits? Almost certainly not. But there were small networks of individuals who proclaimed some of these beliefs and who challenged the existing Church hierarchy. Were some of these people misunderstanding or appropriating Meister Eckhart's words? Possibly, although none of the surviving documents makes such a direct association. Many of these beliefs had been in circulation for a while, and not just in Strasbourg. Half a century earlier, Albert the Great was asked to comment on several similar heretical statements collected by contemporary Church authorities in southern Germany. His final compilation of twenty-nine articles included one that he derided as "Pelagian foolishness": "Where it says that a person is not good unless he leaves God for God's sake"—an early formulation of one of Eckhart's most famous statements (*Therefore I pray to God to make me free of God!*)

Like most of his fellow theologians, Albert classified all false teachings in terms of ancient heresies, in this instance the teaching of St. Augustine's rival Pelagius that individual salvation was largely a matter of self-mastery and willpower. He also detected in his own time a common populist tone: "They say they ought not to reveal the grace they possess to learned men because [such men] would not know what it is. The learned only know what is on the page, but these folk know through experience by means of which they say they suck from the divine sweetness." Finally, Albert found that the self-enlightened of his day tended toward moral lawlessness, usually meaning sexual libertarianism, for example, "what is done below the belt by good people is not a sin."

Fifty years later, Eckhart could not have avoided recognizing the frequent affinity of his own preaching with such still current heterodox ideas. While his sermons vehemently refuted any antinomian interpretations of



01 his own self-divinization project, he remained aware of the persistent dan-
02 ger of misinterpretation. He also unaccountably made things worse for him-
03 self. Either the master was not aware of the heretical origins of some of his
04 most flamboyant sayings—such as “leaving God for God’s sake”—or he in-
05 tentionally appropriated them, supplying a new meaning. Certain of his
06 own orthodoxy and divine calling, he was incautious at best and reckless at
07 worst. There is no evidence that his continued preaching put Eckhart in any
08 direct jeopardy during his time in Strasbourg, but the apparent immunity
09 provided by his status as a Dominican vicar general and Parisian master
10 would not last forever.

11 The beguines he ministered to, by contrast, enjoyed no such reputational
12 protection. Only their Dominican and Franciscan confessors stood between
13 them and the bishop’s wrath. Johann claimed that his most recent clamp-
14 down was based on the *Ad Nostrum* decree of the Council of Vienne, which
15 he subsequently published to all his clergy on October 25, 1317. Early the
16 next year he circulated his edict among other German bishops, hoping to
17 gather support for complete suppression of the beguines. Most of Johann’s
18 peers remained ambivalent about such extreme measures, however, except
19 in the instances where heresy could be indisputably established. Pope
20 John XXII, despite multiple pleas from the Strasbourg bishop, likewise wor-
21 ried about unjust accusations against many pious women and charged
22 Johann to distinguish between good and bad beguines within his own
23 diocese. Instead, under intense pressure from his own clergy, the bishop de-
24 fied the pope and repeated his outright ban of the beguine status in January
25 1319, ordering all houses to disband and their inhabitants to return to their
26 own parishes. A month later he threatened Dominicans and other mendicants
27 with punishment if they failed to back him up. Only a settlement later that
28 year—negotiated in part by Vicar General Eckhart—diffused the crisis, with
29 the bishop agreeing to refer all beguine-related conflicts to independent
30 procurators of the papal curia. The immediate danger to Strasbourg’s be-
31 guines and their mendicant backers—including Meister Eckhart—had been
32 averted.

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Brotherly Accusations

Sometime in 1323, when he was in his early sixties, Eckhart was transferred to the city of Cologne. Though never the seat of an emperor, Cologne was the preeminent German metropolis. Its population of more than forty thousand was the largest of any city in the land and its lord, the prince-bishop of Cologne, one of the most powerful princes of the realm. The Dominican priory of the city also served as a headquarters of sorts for the order, housing about ninety brothers and boasting the most famous *studium generale*, or university school, in Europe. Scholars dispute whether Meister Eckhart formally assumed the lecture chair occupied nearly a half century earlier by his mentor, Albert the Great. Certainly he lectured regularly within the priory as well as in surrounding churches, including those of Dominican, Cistercian, and Benedictine nuns.

Cologne was also home to the largest concentration of beguines in the empire, with 169 houses and between two and four thousand religious women. The archbishop, Heinrich II of Virneburg, had been Bishop Johann of Strasbourg's closest ally in his attempt to identify and punish heretical beguines and to disband the rest. Like Johann, Heinrich detested the women's movement and remained wary of mendicants in general. He was personally familiar with the Marguerite Porete case and had been the only German archbishop in attendance at the Council of Vienne when *Ad Nos-trum* was proclaimed. Like Johann, Heinrich had issued several statutes attempting to close down beguinages, only to become bogged down in conflicts with the city council and local Dominicans. Still his campaign against dangerous preaching continued. The year before Eckhart's arrival in the city, one beghard priest named Walter had been defrocked and condemned to death; shortly afterward, another priest, six beguines, and several laymen were imprisoned for life.

Heinrich of Virneburg was the type of venal and authoritarian church leader that religious reformers loved to hate. As the second son of a ducal family in the Rhineland-Palatinate, he was destined early on for a career in ecclesiastical leadership. Over the course of a long life, he gradually

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01 assembled multiple church offices, skillfully deploying both political maneu-
02 vering skills and family connections. In 1298, his chief patron, King Albrecht
03 I, helped him obtain an archdeaconry in Trier and just two years later got
04 him elected to the powerful office of archbishop of Trier. When Pope Boni-
05 face VIII ordered Heinrich to step aside for the pontiff's preferred candidate,
06 he obeyed and bided his time. Four years later, when the archbishopric of
07 Cologne became available, Heinrich embarked on a two-year lobbying cam-
08 paign with the new pope, Clement V, succeeding only once he agreed not to
09 support the French king, Philip the Fair, and to pay the curia 2,000 silver
10 marks, a considerable sum. He also made private financial arrangements
11 with the cathedral canons of Cologne.

12 As prince-bishop of Cologne, Heinrich subsequently not only oversaw
13 the church personnel and property of four dioceses (Utrecht, Lüttich, Mün-
14 ster, and Trier), but also ruled an expansive secular territorial state. In addi-
15 tion, he was one of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Emperor, a position
16 of tremendous influence in determining the legitimacy of any would-be
17 leader. By the time Eckhart encountered Heinrich in Cologne, the latter was
18 an old man of nearly eighty. Like the master's previous bishop in Strasbourg,
19 the archbishop was primarily a politician operating at the highest level who
20 saw his pastoral duty in terms of maintaining good order and discipline
21 among his clergy and their parishioners. He had not attended university, nor
22 was he a theologian. It's highly improbable that he ever heard one of Meister
23 Eckhart's sermons, let alone read any of his tracts. The prince-bishop rarely,
24 if ever, preached and delegated to his subordinates all matters of doctrine
25 and religious ceremonies. Historians have not been kind to Heinrich, vari-
26 ously characterizing him as selfish, crotchety, and a prodigious drinker. Yet
27 he was also surprisingly energetic, despite many illnesses, and above all very
28 pragmatic.

29 The "beguine problem" in Cologne, in Archbishop Heinrich's eyes, was
30 primarily a matter of applying his authority to satisfy his various constitu-
31 encies. For years he had listened to complaints from his clergy about how be-
32 guines and beghards regularly undermined their own authority vis-à-vis
33S their parishioners. Genuine concern about heresy undoubtedly also played a
34N role in Heinrich's response to the beguines, as did misogyny, exacerbating



Heinrich's apparently deep resentment of such independent women, unaccountable to any Church official. Local Dominicans and Franciscans—likewise unaccountable to the archbishop—further contributed to the potential chaos through their continuing support of such women and intentional humiliation of the city's secular clergy. Forceful actions against unpopular beguines also likely pleased members of the city council, who were enmeshed in arguments with the prince-bishop over the city's rights and privileges.

Heinrich also knew that he could count on papal support for his campaign. John XXII, elected in 1316, was involved in a monumental power struggle with Ludwig of Bavaria (Louis IV), the putative Holy Roman Emperor. Since his defeat of Friedrich the Fair in 1322, Ludwig claimed support of virtually all the German princes and cities. But because Ludwig backed some of the pope's defiant clergy and sought a larger role in ecclesiastical politics, John remained opposed to the new emperor and eventually, in July 1324, excommunicated him and all his followers. While the conflict raged on, the pope was desperate for allies in Germany and turned to Archbishop Heinrich, who agreed to back John—in opposition to much of his clergy—if Cologne's toll rights in the Rhineland were restored. On August 15, 1324, the compliant archbishop sent the papal bull excommunicating Ludwig to the Dominican priory, demanding that it be read aloud in all their churches at Sunday high mass (and that notaries attest this was done). But maintaining the prince-bishop's crucial support, the pope would learn, would not be so simple.

By this time, Heinrich and his advisers had concluded that certain local Dominicans in Cologne—perhaps including Eckhart—played a more active part than previously thought in fostering dangerous ideas among the beguines and their supporters. Complaints to high-placed Dominican officials, with the backing of the pope, eventually surfaced in the order's general chapter of May 1325. Originally scheduled to take place in Eckhart's home priory of Erfurt, the meeting had been moved to the more neutral site of Venice. There the assembled brothers listened as the papal bull of excommunication was read out and all provinces were ordered to follow suit in publicizing the pope's pronouncement. The prior of Regensburg was deposed for

01 his previous failure to comply. The chapter also criticized unnamed “friars
 02 in Teutonia [Eckhart’s province] who say things in their sermons that can
 03 easily lead simple and uneducated people into error.” Provincial Heinrich of
 04 Grünigen, a strict Thomist who perhaps had instigated the complaint him-
 05 self, assured the assembly that he would take appropriate action.

06 Four months later, Pope John XXII decided to take the matter into his
 07 own hands. Here too it is likely that the complaints of Archbishop Heinrich
 08 and his clergy prompted the pope’s unusual intervention into a religious or-
 09 der’s internal discipline. On August 1, 1325, the pontiff unilaterally appointed
 10 two Dominicans—Nicholas of Strasbourg and Benedict of Como—as his
 11 vicars to the province of Teutonia. The master general, Barnabas de Vercel-
 12 lis, was merely informed by an accompanying letter “that some dishonest
 13 and indecent [acts] have been committed by friars of your order in the region
 14 of Germany, and what is honest behavior is left aside or not cared for, on
 15 which a suitable remedy has to be supplied quickly.” The pope appears to be
 16 referring to cases of inadequate observance of the order’s Rule or perhaps
 17 worse misbehavior; there is no explicit reference to dangerous preaching.
 18 Still, the vicars had to conduct a thorough investigation of the entire prov-
 19 ince, beginning with the priory in Cologne.

20 Before the visitation even began, Eckhart and his Cologne brothers were
 21 rocked by a bombshell delivered at the September provincial chapter in Zu-
 22 rich. One or more unidentified friars accused Hermann of Summo, a previ-
 23 ous *visitor* (inspector), of spreading “inflammatory rumors” about other
 24 friars in the province, and writing “notorious pamphlets” accusing Meister
 25 Eckhart and others of heresies. This is the first written record of any such
 26 charges against Eckhart. Apparently Hermann declined to confront any of
 27 those defamed in person, preferring to rely on gossip and innuendo. False
 28 accusation of a brother was a serious offense among Dominicans. Upon re-
 29 turn to Cologne, the vicar Nicholas of Strasbourg found still more troubling
 30 charges against Hermann: unjustly sentencing two friars while *visitor*, at-
 31 tempting to rig a priory election, frequently vanishing at night from the pri-
 32 ory in civilian clothes, and consorting with several lewd people, including a
 33S notorious priest’s concubine. Another brother, Wilhelm of Nideggen, was
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similarly accused of socializing with a disreputable crowd and maintaining especially close ties to one particular nun, even after his superior had forbidden him to see her anymore. 01
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Faced with certain punishment, both friars immediately turned on Meister Eckhart, offering to provide incriminating statements of his multiple heretical statements. The brothers' assumptions that such charges might gain a sympathetic audience suggests that there was already some whispering or even grumbling about Eckhart within the order. Nicholas, a respected theologian, remained skeptical and wrote to Eckhart, who responded promptly and satisfactorily to the accusations brought against him. Empowered by the pope to punish as well as investigate, Nicholas pronounced both Wilhelm and Hermann false accusers, transferred Wilhelm to Aachen, and incarcerated Hermann in the Cologne priory's jail. The papal vicar continued to inspect the province on behalf of the pope, but considered the Meister Eckhart matter closed. 04
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Wilhelm of Nideggen, however, did not accept his exile gracefully. Upon arriving in Aachen he became allied with "a certain lewd and suspect friar and began to move around to different places." In the spring of 1326, though forbidden to travel, he attended the Dominican general chapter in Paris and unsuccessfully attempted to stir up trouble for Eckhart. Wilhelm then returned to Cologne and repeated his previous accusation against Meister Eckhart to the archbishop. His timing was perfect, as Heinrich had just launched a new general investigation, or inquisition, of lay and clerical heresy within his jurisdiction. Inquisitorial procedure, unlike most criminal law, permitted a great deal of secret testimony, thus depriving the accused of the full range of evidence assembled against him or her. The papal vicar Nicholas of Strasbourg, according to Wilhelm, could not be trusted and was himself an abettor of heresy. Intrigued, the archbishop arranged for the release of Hermann, who joined Wilhelm as open accusers of Eckhart. He also appointed two theologians, Reinhard of Friesland and Petrus de Estate (a Franciscan), as investigators. Together, the inquisitors compiled a total of forty-nine supposedly heretical statements drawn by Eckhart's accusers from various published works and sermons. 16
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The Master Responds

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04 Most of Eckhart's brethren in Cologne, including the prior, Johann of
05 Greifenstein, were outraged by what they considered scurrilous attacks on a
06 great man. The master himself appears to have been alternately stunned and
07 furious that he should be questioned in such a way. On September 26, 1326,
08 Eckhart defended himself before the inquisitors. He began with a direct (and
09 legitimate) challenge to the authority of the archbishops' inquisitors: *accord-*
10 *ing to the exemption and privileges of my order, I am not held to appear before you or*
11 *to answer charges. This is especially true,* he continued, *since I am not accused of*
12 *heresy and have never been denounced overtly, as my whole life and teaching testify,*
13 *and as the esteem of the brethren of the whole order and men and women of the entire*
14 *kingdom and of every nation corroborates.* The false suggestion made against him,
15 Eckhart claimed, was based on professional jealousy: *indeed, if I were less well*
16 *known among the people and less eager for justice, I am sure that such attempts*
17 *would not have been made against me by envious people.* After several invocations
18 of scriptural passages praising patient suffering, the master proudly noted
19 that *in my own lifetime, the masters of theology at Paris received a command from*
20 *above to examine the books of those two most distinguished men, Saint Thomas*
21 *Aquinas and Brother Albert [the Great], on the grounds that they were suspect and*
22 *erroneous.* Like these revered fellow Dominicans, Eckhart predicted, he too
23 would be vindicated.

24 Throughout his defense, Eckhart relied overwhelmingly on his reputa-
25 tion and his abilities as a preeminent theologian. Acknowledging his au-
26 thorship of all the articles compiled against him, he went further, arguing,
27 *I hold that they are all true, although many are uncommon and subtle. If there is*
28 *something false I do not see in them or in my other remarks and writings I am al-*
29 *ways ready to yield to a better understanding.* This simultaneous assertion of
30 superior intellect and obedient humility was followed by an especially
31 clever distinction: *I can be in error, but I cannot be a heretic, because the first be-*
32 *longs to the intellect, the second to the will.* Prove me wrong, the scholastic
33S challenged, and I will concede, but be sure that you have the abilities to hold
34N forth on my level.

Meister Eckhart then proceeded to lecture the two inquisitors as if they were students attending one of his courses in Paris, intentionally employing abstruse philosophical terms and concepts. *To clarify the objections brought against me, three things must be kept in mind, all of them scholastic distinctions. The first is that the words "insofar as" [in quantum]—an important qualifier of seemingly sweeping statements—that is, a reduplication, exclude from the term in question everything that is other or foreign to it even according to reason.* Several examples follow, including *although in God the Father essence and paternity are the same, He does not generate insofar as He is essence, but insofar as He is Father, even though the essence is the root of generation.*

These and other prefatory remarks, however sincere, were clearly intended as intellectual intimidation. It was an understandable but not attractive emotional reaction from Meister Eckhart, who expressed disdain for the inferior minds who had deigned to challenge him. After responding to each of the articles before him, the master railed against the *ignorance and stupidity* of those who had condemned him.

They think that everything they do not understand is an error and that every error is a heresy, when only obstinate adherence to error makes heresy and a heretic, as the laws and the doctors hold . . . although they say they are inquisitors in search of heresy, they turn to my books and object to things that are purely natural truths [and] they object to things as heretical that Saint Thomas openly uses for the solution of certain arguments and that they either have not seen or remembered.

In their ignorance, Eckhart charged, his critics failed to realize that most of what they questioned had been expressed by the Church Fathers or *is the common opinion of the doctors.* To imply that *man cannot be united with God . . . is against the teaching of Christ and the Evangelist.* After citing several more examples, an exasperated Eckhart finally concluded: *that is enough for now.*

When a second list of fifty-nine articles was produced, the master again methodically provided the orthodox interpretation of each excerpt, but this time he implied that his accusers had intentionally misconstrued his teachings:

01 *Know that these articles that follow, just like the earlier ones, are always or*
 02 *almost always false and erroneous in the sense in which my opponents take*
 03 *them, but reasonably and devoutly understood they contain excellent and*
 04 *useful truths of faith and moral teaching. They demonstrate the mental*
 05 *weakness and spite of my adversaries, and even their open blasphemy and*
 06 *heresy, if they obstinately defend the following points, which are against the*
 07 *teaching of Christ, the Evangelist, the saints and the doctors.*

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09 People who denied that humans could be united with God were the heretics,
 10 he fulminated, not those who upheld centuries of Catholic tradition.

11 Eckhart's response was more than a clever maneuver; it was a heartfelt
 12 declaration about the very truth of the gospel. In the charged environment
 13 of Cologne, though, any hint of heresy was an exceptionally serious matter.
 14 Few beyond the master's local Dominican brothers were willing to risk the
 15 wrath of Archbishop Heinrich by opposing the Eckhart investigation. Nich-
 16 olas of Strasbourg, who himself now stood accused as an abettor of heresy,
 17 made at least three appeals to Dominicans outside the province for assis-
 18 tance, but received no response. On January 14, 1327, he himself was sum-
 19 moned to appear before the inquisitorial court, formally charged by Wilhelm
 20 of Nideggen as a *fautor haeresiae* ("favorer of heresy"). Accompanied by ten of
 21 his brethren, Nicholas rejected the court's authority and made a direct ap-
 22 peal to the Holy See, currently residing in Avignon. Ten days later, Eckhart
 23 followed suit.

24 When he came before the two inquisitors on January 24, Eckhart was
 25 accompanied by an impressive group of character witnesses: the Carmelite
 26 provincial of lower Alemannia, three Carmelite scholars, two Augustinians,
 27 two Franciscans, and other unnamed "trustworthy witnesses, who had
 28 asked to be present." In his rejection of the court's competency, Eckhart re-
 29 peated many of his complaints about intentional misinterpretations, and
 30 added that the unusual duration of the investigation had resulted in great
 31 damage to his own reputation and that of the Dominicans in general. While
 32 he had promptly replied to every request, the inquisitors had *willfully or even*
 33S *more with criminal intent* prolonged the procedure, *lead[ing] me around in a*
 34N *circle, ambushing me, trying to trap me, and with the greatest scandal . . .*

prejudicing the state of my person and my order. Eckhart no longer had any faith whatsoever that a fair decision could be reached by the current judges, who seemed readier to listen to disreputable troublemakers such as Wilhelm and Hermann than the many more brethren who came to his defense. Careful never to criticize the archbishop himself, the alleged heretic claimed that no one other than the Holy Father himself had the right or the wisdom to judge his case.

While waiting for the outcome of his appeal, Meister Eckhart made one especially passionate public defense of his innocence, the equivalent of the traditional Germanic oath of purgation. Since ancient times, this public refutation of any criminal or other accusations had served to restore the reputation of an aggrieved member of the community. Accompanied by ten of his brethren (oath-helpers, or character witnesses), he rose to the pulpit of the Dominican church in Cologne on Sunday, February 13. While his associate Conrad of Halberstadt read out a prepared Latin document, the master translated "point by point" into German and commented. The speech began with an emotional declaration of innocence.

I Meister Eckhart, doctor of sacred theology, declare before anything else, invoking God as witness, that I have always detested any error in faith and all deviant behavior . . . if something erroneous may be found in the foresaid [matters] having been written or said or preached by me, openly or privately, in what time or place whatsoever, directly or indirectly, out of less good understanding or to be reproved, I expressly revoke publicly all and every single sentence of this in front of you who are present, because I from now on want to have it held as not said or written by you because I hear I have been understood wrongly.

Eckhart's appearance before the church's congregation, presumably including many of his lay and clerical supporters, was not an attempt to start a popular movement in his support. He knew that neither the archbishop nor his inquisitors would be swayed by such means. This was Eckhart the man defending his honor and by extension his reputation. This time, the tone of the defense was not that of the haughty scholastic but of the wounded friar,



01 who had dedicated his life to spreading God's word. Many of the statements
 02 attributed to him, he claimed, were not even accurate transcriptions. At
 03 times the normally commanding preacher sounds frantic, incoherent, even
 04 equivocating:

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*. . . and I also never said, as far as I know, nor meant, that something would
 be in the soul, something of the soul that would be uncreated and cannot be
 created, because then the soul would be pieced together out of [what is] cre-
 ated and [what is] uncreated. I have written and taught the contrary, unless
 somebody would like to say "uncreated," or "not created," that is, "not cre-
 ated by itself," but rather concreated.*

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Whatever the accusation, the clearly shaken master vowed to *correct and
 revoke whensoever and as often as this would be appropriate everything that could
 be found as having a less good understanding.* Eckhart's diffident willingness to
 recant any "erroneous" statements was a notable reversal of his previous
 defiant attitude. Perhaps only at this moment did he realize the determina-
 tion and resources of the enemies assembled against him. With such a con-
 cession, he could still pursue his cause but without any danger to his person
 as a condemned heretic.

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Nine days later, on February 22, Meister Eckhart, accompanied by his
 prior and two other companions, reported to the library of the archbishop's
 palace. Upon his arrival, the inquisitor Master Reinhard greeted him, then
 immediately delivered the unwelcome news: "We have arrived at the deci-
 sion not to concede the [right] to appeal . . . because this is evidently frivo-
 lous, as follows manifestly from the acts of the inquisition because of heresy
 pending against the same Meister Eckhart." In other words, the Cologne
 investigation would continue. Two notaries recorded the pronouncement,
 then accompanied Eckhart and his group to the Franciscan house next door,
 where Albertus of Milan, who had replaced Petrus de Estate as the second
 inquisitor, repeated the same decision and handed the accused heretic a copy.
 Everyone present at both meetings knew, however, that the lower inquisi-
 tional court did not have the ability to prevent Eckhart from carrying
 through his appeal to the pope. As soon as winter passed, the master set out



with his provincial Heinrich of Cigno, Nicholas of Strasbourg, and three other brethren to make the six-hundred-mile journey to Avignon, the new home of the Holy See.

Looking for Justice in the New Rome

There could have been few starker contrasts to Meister Eckhart's interior spirituality than the Avignon of 1327. One longtime resident, the famed humanist Petrarch, called it "unholy Babylon, thou sink of iniquity, thou cesspool of the world." Within the space of two decades, a picturesque town of 5,000 on the banks of the Rhone had been transformed into the headquarters of western Christendom, a metropolis of more than 25,000, teeming with various ecclesiastical, political, and business dignitaries and their retinues. When Pope Clement V established residency there in 1309, the stay was meant to be temporary, not unlike the other extended absences from Rome of his predecessors. Since 1100, popes had spent more than half of their reigns outside the Eternal City, most of them decamping to one of their palaces in the Italian countryside to avoid Roman politics and any threats to their own power. For his part, Clement chose to relocate to Avignon because of violent conflicts between his own backers, known as Guelphs, and supporters of the emperor, known as Ghibellines. But after Clement's death in 1314, his successor, John XXII, decided it was still best to maintain a distance from his proxy battles with the emperor. What John did not anticipate was that he and his successors would remain in Avignon for another sixty-four years, a period subsequently known—thanks to the excoriations of Petrarch, Dante, and others—as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Church."

When Eckhart and his companions passed through the city's gates in the spring of 1327, two months after setting forth from Cologne, what they encountered was one enormous construction site. Once it became clear that the papacy might stay in Avignon indefinitely, certain cardinals and other church dignitaries had begun tearing down the ramshackle housing of the old city and constructing opulent palaces of their own. Papal ambassadors from across Europe refused to stay in the city and joined most of the

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01 cardinals in developing property outside Avignon's massive walls. In 1316,
02 the newly installed Pope John XXII attempted to forestall the building frenzy
03 and forbade his cardinals from retaining retinues of more than ten squires.
04 Even so, once the necessary clerks, artisans, and other workers were added,
05 each of roughly one hundred cardinals maintained a household (*familia*) of
06 at least twenty or thirty people. Consequently, the market for luxury items
07 in Avignon surged, attracting numerous dealers in fine fabrics, jewelry, and
08 rare delicacies.

09 Meanwhile, Pope John had begun to renovate the existing episcopal res-
10 idence to be worthy of the many dignitaries he would entertain. Visitors
11 were received in a magnificent grand hall, fitted with silk and taffeta tapes-
12 tries and luxurious carpets. Bankers and ambassadors were feted with sumptu-
13 ous banquets on par with those of a king or emperor, where they ate off
14 silver plates with gold utensils. At least five hundred people were employed
15 in the papal court alone, including some two hundred knights and squires as
16 well as the chamberlain who cared for the pontiff's vestments and uncov-
17 ered the papal slipper that visitors were expected to kiss. Maintaining this
18 level of magnificence required a substantial budget, with the pope annually
19 spending more than 8,000 gold florins (over US\$1 million in modern terms)
20 on clothing alone. Six years earlier, John had bought a country villa, a short
21 distance north of the city, with a stunning pleasure garden leading down to
22 the River Ouvèze, as well as a newly constructed nearby castle (Châteauneuf)
23 with a sizable vineyard (which still produces a grand cru today under the
24 name Château Pape-Clément). The year 1327 saw the peak of private and
25 public construction, with the erection of many new monuments, the open-
26 ing of a papal zoo (with animals from all parts of the known world), and the
27 creation of early blueprints for what would eventually become the famed
28 Palais des Papes. At night the pope slept in silk bedclothes on a feather mat-
29 tress and laid his head on a pillow lined with ermine.

30 It's not difficult to imagine what Eckhart and his fellow friars thought of
31 such pomp. Yet they were men of experience and knew the face of worldly
32 power. Even the Dominican priory in Avignon was grand, with a colossal
33S Gothic church containing not one but three naves. The Order of Preachers
34N had been established in the city for over a century by the time Eckhart and



his party arrived, and many of the priory's members had become powerful leaders in the Church, most recently Guillaume Pierre Godin (c. 1260–1336), who was serving at the time as dean (president) of the College of Cardinals. Just four years earlier the Avignon Dominicans had celebrated the canonization of Thomas Aquinas, a tremendous achievement for the entire order, but especially here, in the heart of papal power. Eckhart would apparently not want for well-connected allies when his case came before the pontiff.

News of Eckhart's ordeal preceded his arrival in Avignon. Hermann of Summo, one of the master's chief accusers, had arrived before him and denounced Eckhart to the master of the Avignon Dominican priory, Barnabas de Vercellis. The archbishop's inquisitors had also decided to withdraw their rejection of Eckhart's appeal and had sent two delegates with all the relevant documents to the papal consistory in Avignon. In response, Nicholas of Strasbourg traveled on to the Dominican spring chapter in Perpignan (in the Pyrenees) and persuaded the assembled brethren to reinstate the punishments against Eckhart's accusers. The master's backers in Avignon then sent a letter to Pope John, demanding that both men be arrested and handed over to their superiors for punishment. Hermann was in fact subsequently imprisoned by the papal curia; whether Wilhelm ever arrived in Avignon is unknown.

The case against Eckhart, however, did not die with the disappearance of his two chief accusers. Archbishop Heinrich, out of genuine concern about heresy or simple mistrust of Eckhart, insisted that the investigation continue. Given Eckhart's public oath of purgation back in Cologne, there was no danger to his person, only to his reputation. In effect, it was now a censure case, a procedure in which a commission of theological experts would determine whether the various statements Eckhart acknowledged making were in fact within the realm of Catholic orthodoxy. At no time was there a possibility of Meister Eckhart's being burned at the stake, the fate of those unfortunate individuals who clung obstinately to their errors. Still, his reputation as a preacher, as well as his personal honor, lay in real jeopardy.

The man to whom Eckhart appealed for justice had little interest in what he considered mere theological niceties. Pope John XXII, born Jacques Duèse in the Occitain region of southwest France, was a civil lawyer who had

01 shrewdly served as court chancellor for Charles II, king of Naples. Historians
02 have judged him an astute jurist, a prudent financier, and a rigid despot. A
03 small, delicate, pale man of eighty-three, he nonetheless demonstrated great
04 energy and willpower, with an astounding capacity for work. Subordinates
05 found him exceptionally demanding and occasionally harsh, but rarely
06 cruel. Like Eckhart, he was a man of vision and determination, almost
07 single-minded in his sense of vocation.

08 But that vision could not have been more different. Above all, John
09 sought to establish an imperial papacy, the greatest power—secular or
10 religious—in all of Christendom. Like all state builders, he knew the impor-
11 tance of money, and immediately upon assuming the papacy in 1316, he be-
12 gan revolutionizing the finances of his office. Tightening central control of
13 benefices—church offices such as bishop, archdeacon, pastor—was the key.
14 Under John’s leadership, his Camera Apostolica began collecting annual
15 taxes of 10 percent on the income of all benefices, as well as an *annate* (the
16 total revenue of the first year) from newly bestowed benefices, fees for dis-
17 pensations from canon law (such as permission for second cousins to marry),
18 and various other administrative charges. He also took more direct control
19 over appointments to benefices, eliminating the election of bishops by cathe-
20 dral chapters and appointing all high clerics himself, including twenty-eight
21 new cardinals (twenty-six of them from southern France and three of them
22 his nephews). By the time of Eckhart’s arrival in Avignon, John had quintu-
23 pled the annual income of the papacy, to more than half a million florins,
24 equal to that of the kingdoms of France or England. One eyewitness wrote
25 that “every time I went to the apartment of the Lord Pope’s chamberlain, I
26 inevitably found bankers, money changers, tables loaded with gold, and
27 clerks weighing and counting florins.” Contemporaries nicknamed him “the
28 Midas pope.”

29 The greatest obstacle to John’s ambitions for the papacy was the Holy
30 Roman Emperor, Ludwig of Bavaria, who refused to kowtow to the pontiff
31 on the question of benefices and ecclesiastical oversight. Two thirds of the
32 pope’s expanded income was devoured by the costs of proxy wars with Lud-
33 wig in Italy. The conflict also consumed most of John’s attention, although
34N battles against heresy always invigorated him, given their threat to the

orderly functioning of the Church. John was no fan of the beguine movement and probably shared some of Archbishop Heinrich's misgivings about Eckhart and other Dominican enablers, but the central doctrinal controversy of his reign was his struggle with certain Franciscans over the definition of apostolic poverty—a return to the very issue Pope Innocent III thought he had resolved a century earlier.

The dispute over members of the clergy owning property reached a head in 1327, the same year Eckhart arrived in Avignon, when the pope summoned the minister general of the Franciscans, Michael of Cesena (ca. 1270–1342), to appear before him in Avignon. Michael enjoyed wide support among his brethren, particularly in Italy, where Ludwig of Bavaria had just invaded. The potential of an alliance between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Franciscans greatly distressed the pope. As the emperor made his way steadily to Rome, John scrambled to ostracize his enemy, making new proclamations against him and fortifying existing alliances, including that with the archbishop of Cologne. It's not clear how much the pope knew about the specifics of Eckhart's case or wanted to. Given the master's apparent willingness to recant and the much greater matters of state at stake, a censure case against a German theologian was at most an afterthought to the preoccupied lawyer-pontiff.

Pruning the Field of the Lord

The papal investigation of Meister Eckhart was thus primarily an academic exercise, albeit one with lasting consequences for the master's good name and his teachings. Sometime in the second half of 1327, a panel of theologians examined the evidence forwarded from Cologne. The commission could not ignore the accusations and replies of the previous twelve months but neither were they bound by the previous inquisition's conclusions. Beginning with four or five lists of more than 150 suspicious articles, the investigating theologians winnowed the charges against the Dominican master down to twenty-eight questionable propositions. Two thirds of the articles appear to have been drawn from Latin works, mainly the commentaries on

01 Genesis and John and the *Book of Divine Comfort*. The remaining quotations
 02 seem to come from German sermons, although the wording is too imprecise
 03 to be sure. There is no apparent order to the excerpts, which to the contrary
 04 often repeat or return to earlier subjects in the list.

05 The articles singled out by the theological commission fell into five gener-
 06 al groups: comments on creation, characterizations of sin, criticisms of
 07 external acts, statements about God, and descriptions of the divine man.
 08 Many can be attributed to Eckhart's hyperbolic exuberance. The fifteenth
 09 article, for example, sounds just like the master exaggerating to make a
 10 point: *If a man had committed a thousand mortal sins, if such a man were rightly*
 11 *disposed he ought not to will that he had not committed them.* God's merciful for-
 12 giveness, in other words, is beyond measure and in that sense all human sin
 13 is part of the providential plan. Other articles are misquotes or are taken out
 14 of context.

15 The articles concerning good works, by contrast, are direct quotations
 16 from sermons and do not seriously distort the general tenor of Eckhart's
 17 teaching. *He who prays for anything particular prays badly* (article seven) is a
 18 fairly accurate representation of the master's rejection of petitionary prayer,
 19 as are articles sixteen through nineteen on the internal nature of salvation:

20
 21 *God does not properly command an exterior act. . . . The exterior act is not*
 22 *properly good or divine, and God does not produce it or give birth to it in the*
 23 *proper sense. . . . Let us bring forth the fruit not of exterior acts, which do not*
 24 *make us good, but of interior acts, which the Father who abides in us makes*
 25 *and produces . . . God loves souls, not the exterior work.*

26
 27 As with Eckhart's statements about sin, such comments themselves were
 28 insufficient to have triggered an investigation, but proved useful given the
 29 inquisitors' already established charge.

30 Much more serious for the papal commission were Eckhart's various
 31 claims about God, including the first three articles dealing with God's exist-
 32 tence and the supposed eternity of the world. In his reply, Eckhart main-
 33S tained that these statements needed to be understood in terms of *the eternal*
 34N *Now*, the moment outside of time where God existed. Invoking this concept

to justify his teachings was a tactical misstep on Eckhart's part. The *eternal Now* was a tenet of Neoplatonic philosophy, but the master's judges were, to a man, adherents of Aristotelian philosophy and thus rejected his argument out of hand. A similarly scholastic difference of interpretation is evident in articles twenty-three and twenty-four, where Eckhart argued that *no distinction can exist or be understood in God Himself*. In stressing the unity of "the One," Eckhart seemed to be challenging the doctrine of the Trinity, which held that the Father, the Son (Christ), and the Holy Spirit are three aspects or manifestations of the same one God—although the master vehemently insisted that he was not. Such fine distinctions were the stuff of academic disputations, except that Eckhart was not permitted to defend himself with oral arguments, only written ones.

The most dangerous articles were those excerpts describing the effects of the divine birth on an individual, for these came closest to sounding like endorsements of the Free Spirit heresy. Predictably, Eckhart's equating of the *divine man* with Christ caused the biggest stir, accounting for a quarter of the twenty-eight excerpts. Article ten, for instance, slightly tweaked and artfully arranged quotations from one German sermon to devastating effect:

We shall all be transformed totally into God and changed into him. In the same way, when in the sacrament bread is changed into Christ's Body, I am so changed into him that he makes me his one existence, and not just similar. By the living God it is true that there is no distinction there.

The next four articles more faithfully reproduced Eckhart's words, but the impact was just as incriminating: *Whatever holy scripture says of Christ, all that is also very true of every good and divine man*. The master's penchant for surprising and even shocking his audience had never met with greater success.

As in Cologne, Eckhart claimed that virtually all of the assembled articles had been taken out of context and he proceeded to defend their orthodoxy by arguing in typical scholastic style and terms. But his inquisitors were not interested in the master's greater philosophy or his subtle justifications. Their concern was the impact of such "heretical" or "evil-sounding" words on the simple laypeople who attended Eckhart's sermons. To a



01 degree, this claim was disingenuous, since more of the excerpts in question
 02 in fact came from his Latin writings, but the principal danger remained not
 03 Eckhart's intent but what other people might have heard. This distinction
 04 seems to have eluded the master, who continued to battle in the way he
 05 knew best, with the scholarly weapons of the *disputatio*.

06 The next step in the procedure would have been for the case to come
 07 before a cardinal's tribunal, where Eckhart would finally have a chance to
 08 defend himself before a judge. But early in the new year, most likely on Jan-
 09 uary 28, 1328, Meister Eckhart died. No details about his death or burial
 10 survive, and only very recently has an enterprising historian determined the
 11 time and place of the master's death. Eckhart was in his late sixties and far
 12 from both Tübingen and Erfurt. Our only commemoration from the time is
 13 Pope John XXII's claim that before Eckhart left this world he drew up a pub-
 14 lic document,

15
 16 profess[ing] the Catholic faith at the end of his life and revok[ing] and
 17 also deplor[ing] the twenty-six articles, which he admitted that he
 18 had preached, and also any others, written and taught by him,
 19 whether in the schools or in sermons, insofar as [*in quantum*] they
 20 could generate in the minds of the faithful a heretical opinion or one
 21 erroneous and hostile to the true faith.

22
 23 How fitting that Eckhart ended his argument (and his life) with his favorite
 24 scholastic qualifier—*insofar as*—in effect maintaining to the end that he knew
 25 his words were orthodox but regretted if anyone misunderstood them. And
 26 how typical that his evasion of guilt fell on deaf ears among his accusers.

27 Normally, according to Roman law, an inquisition or other process ended
 28 with the death of the accused. Two factors kept Eckhart's case alive after his
 29 own demise. The less significant one came from an outside evaluation pre-
 30 pared by the theologian Jacques Fournier (ca. 1285–1342). Fournier had stud-
 31 ied and taught in Paris, likely worked on the Marguerite Porete case, and
 32 received his master's degree in 1314, during Meister Eckhart's second magis-
 33S terium. The Cistercian had climbed quickly up the ecclesiastical ladder, be-
 34N coming an abbot in 1311, at the age of twenty-six, then serving as chief



inquisitor against the last Cathars in Languedoc from 1318 to 1322. In the end, only five heretics were burned at the stake, but the experience—which he described in a 1323 book—earned Fournier a reputation as an extremely punctilious, tenacious, and conscientious foe of heresy in all forms. Pope John congratulated him with a sheaf of indulgences and the bishopric of Mirepoix in 1326 and the next year with a cardinal's hat.

The man subsequently known as the White Cardinal (because of his Cistercian robes) was a rising star in the curia of John XXII (and seven years hence would succeed his patron as Pope Benedict XII). He had already written extensively for the pope in the Franciscan controversies of the past few years, including learned criticisms of Peter Olivi, William of Ockham, and Michael of Cesena, the head of the order. Shortly before Eckhart's death, Fournier compiled an expert outside assessment of the articles against the Dominican. He displayed no sentimentality in judging his former Parisian colleague. Most articles were condemned as "false and heretical," another as "blasphemous and insane," still another as "laughable among all intelligent people." A few items, the cardinal granted, were merely wrong (such as *that all creatures are pure nothing*). Fournier's report became part of Eckhart's still-open case file.

The pope clearly valued his new cardinal's opinion, but it was the continued urging of Eckhart's Cologne persecutor, Archbishop Heinrich, that ultimately persuaded the pontiff to move forward with the censure case. Shortly before the Dominican's death, on January 17, Ludwig had himself crowned emperor in Rome; three months later he declared John deposed for heresy, and on May 12, the emperor appointed his own pope, Nicholas V (Pietro Rainalducci of Corvaro). Within a few weeks, the Franciscans Michael of Cesena and William of Ockham both slipped out of Avignon and joined Ludwig in Rome and later in Munich. Pope John's call for a crusade against the emperor was met with derision and he was again desperate for allies, especially in Germany. If Heinrich of Virneburg insisted that the pope pursue Eckhart's case, it was a small price to pay for the archbishop's crucial loyalty.

Still, it was not until March 27, 1329—fourteen months after Meister Eckhart's death—that the eighty-five-year-old pope issued the condemnation



01 known as *In agro dominico* (“In the field of the Lord”). In the bull, John
 02 lamented the “evil weeds” and “devil’s seeds” that had recently taken root
 03 among “the good crop of Catholic truth.” Specifically,

04
 05 we are indeed sad to report that in these days someone by the name
 06 of Eckhart from Germany, a doctor of sacred theology (as is said) and
 07 a professor of the Order of Preachers, wished to know more than he
 08 should, and not in accordance with sobriety and the measure of faith,
 09 because he turned his ear from the truth and followed fables. The
 10 man was led astray by the Father of Lies . . . [and] he presented many
 11 things as dogma that were designed to cloud the true faith in the
 12 hearts of many, things which he put forth especially before the uned-
 13 ucated crowd in his sermons and that he admitted also in his
 14 writings.

15
 16 The pope takes a harsh tone, possibly to reassure Archbishop Heinrich,
 17 but at no point does he condemn Eckhart himself as a heretic. He also men-
 18 tions the deathbed “recantation,” and censures only fifteen of the twenty-
 19 eight articles as heretical “as the words sound,” two others as heretical but
 20 not authenticated, and eleven more as “quite evil sounding, very rash,” and
 21 likely to be misunderstood, “though with many explanations and additions
 22 they might take on or possess a Catholic meaning.” The pope did not order
 23 any books to be burned, but warned that if anyone presumed “to defend or
 24 approve the same articles in an obstinate manner, we desire and order a pro-
 25 cess of heresy.”

26 Three weeks later, on April 15, 1329, Pope John sent a copy of his bull to
 27 Archbishop Heinrich in Cologne, ordering him to have it proclaimed
 28 throughout the diocese and city of Cologne, “so that through such publica-
 29 tion the hearts of the simple people, who are easy to mislead, and to whom
 30 Eckhart during his lifetime preached the afore-mentioned articles, might
 31 not be infected by the erroneous teaching contained in them.” This—both
 32 pope and archbishop fervently hoped—would be the end of the story for the
 33S man who “wished to know more than he should.”

34N





{ CHAPTER THIRTEEN }

The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing

*If anyone cannot understand this sermon, he need not worry.
For so long as a man is not equal to this truth, he cannot
understand my words, for this is a naked truth which
has come direct from the heart of God.*

GERMAN SERMON 52

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Our Sweet and Sainted Teacher

In 1356, the Benedictine monk Oswald of Brentzhausen translated into Latin a work that he mistakenly attributed to the late Meister Eckhart. *Sister Katie* (*Schwester Katrei*), originally composed in the Alemannic dialect, did in fact date from the master's time in Strasbourg four decades earlier. It also contained many familiar Eckhartian elements. In the treatise, a beguine penitent, Sister Katie, has become impatient with the spiritual counseling of her Dominican confessor and asks him to teach her the most expedient way to salvation. When he demurs, she leaves to pursue a life of detachment "in foreign lands," guided only by the Holy Spirit. After a time, she returns to Strasbourg, so transformed by her experience that her confessor can barely recognize her. Yet even in her new angelic form, she has not yet attained divine union. Her confessor advises her (in good Eckhart fashion) to let go



01 even of her desire for God, and after a great deal of praying and meditation
 02 she exclaims to him, "Sir, rejoice with me, I have become God!" Skeptical
 03 that her new state can last, the confessor observes as she withdraws to a cor-
 04 ner of the church and becomes completely still, seemingly dead to all observ-
 05 ers. After three days of frozen ecstasy, she comes back to life and claims that
 06 she is now in a permanent state of union with God, having "achieved by
 07 grace what Christ is by nature." Astounded, the confessor becomes the pu-
 08 pil, learning from his former "daughter" how to become God. In the course
 09 of her instructions, she confirms the reality of heaven, hell, and purgatory
 10 and denies the freedom from moral constraints proclaimed by some Free
 11 Spirit followers. At the same time, she minimizes the necessity of priests and
 12 sacraments, preferring individual guidance from the Holy Spirit.

13 For more than a century after Meister Eckhart's death, a variety of ser-
 14 mons and apocryphal stories like this one vied to define the master's legacy.
 15 The humiliated theologian of the 1329 papal condemnation was gradually
 16 forgotten; in his place emerged the venerable sage who gently guided spiri-
 17 tual seekers along the path to divine union. In folk poetry and fictive dia-
 18 logues, "the man from whom God hid nothing" offered learned (if frequently
 19 obscure) aphorisms and encountered many would-be disciples, including
 20 "The Naked Boy," who turned out to be God himself in disguise. Many spu-
 21 rious sermons circulated, as did many genuine works, most famously in the
 22 collection known as *The Paradise of the Intellectual Soul*, a compendium of
 23 sixty-four sermons, half written by Meister Eckhart, the rest by fellow Do-
 24 minicans. Almost all of the portrayals of the departed master were positive,
 25 even reverential.

26 But what was this spiritual legacy? In works such as *Sister Katie*, the teach-
 27 ings of Eckhart are conflated with some more radical Free Spirit ideas, seem-
 28 ingly justifying Pope John XXII's concerns. A 1353 Dutch treatise, *Meister*
 29 *Eckhart and the Unknown Layperson*, even more directly appropriates the Do-
 30 minican for a pro-beguine criticism of saints' cults and the church hierarchy.
 31 Like other religious icons, Meister Eckhart—officially discredited but more
 32 popular than ever—risked becoming a multipurpose literary figure, who
 33S seemingly endorsed a wide range of ideas and practices, some far from his
 34N actual teaching.

Immediately after the master's death, control of the Eckhart "brand" fell to the people who had the most to lose from its tarnishing—his fellow Dominicans. Their initial reaction was one of fear and caution. Few friars openly criticized the late master, but following the pope's condemnation in early 1329, the Dominican general chapter, meeting in Sisteron, near Avignon, underscored the order's enthusiastic support for the teaching of its most orthodox and newly canonized theologian, Thomas Aquinas. Within the next two years, virtually all of Eckhart's most vocal supporters, including his provincial Heinrich of Cigno, were purged from their leadership positions within the order. Whatever copies of the master's writings that were destroyed appear to have suffered this fate at the hands of his fellow Dominicans, eager to mollify the pope and prove their dedication to orthodoxy.

At the same time, some of Meister Eckhart's followers within the order took it upon themselves to defend the master's legacy, although they took care to avoid any associations whatsoever with heretical belief. Heinrich Suso (ca. 1295–1366), who had studied under Eckhart in both Strasbourg and Cologne, was outraged by the investigation and condemnation of his master. As a young friar, Suso had undertaken the path of self-torment common to many nuns and beguines, fasting for long periods, wearing a spiked crucifix under his habit, and at one point even carving Christ's name into his own flesh above his heart. Profoundly depressed by his own unworthiness, Suso claimed that only the intervention of the "saintly Meister Eckhart" had freed him "from the hell in which he had existed for so long a time."

During the period before and after Eckhart's condemnation, Suso published two works. In the *Little Book of Truth*, he singles his master out as "one of the most learned and experienced human beings to whom God has revealed his hidden wisdom." A series of dialogues between Truth and its disciple presents a succinct primer of Eckhart's main teachings: the unfathomable nature of being, distinctions between God and the Godhead, the origins of multiplicity and of evil, the nature of true detachment and self-surrender, breakthrough, and becoming one with the divine will. Suso apparently had access to the condemned twenty-eight articles, and skillfully uses such authorities as Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux to convey the true understanding (and orthodoxy) of Meister Eckhart's words. Finally he explicitly



01 distinguishes his revered master from those people with “a mistaken idea of
 02 freedom,” who “live completely according to [their] impulses, heedless of all
 03 else, without looking ahead or behind.” Such people are reckless, disorderly,
 04 and selfish, since “a person never becomes so completely annihilated in this
 05 [eternal] nothing that his senses are not aware of the difference of their ori-
 06 gin or his reason is not aware of its free choice.” Consequently, “some uned-
 07 ucated but intelligent people have falsely understood their teachers with
 08 respect to the lofty meanings of sacred scripture, twisting it according to
 09 their own undisciplined nature and even writing things down, but not ac-
 10 cording to the true sense of scriptures.”

11 Yet even Suso’s understanding of Eckhart’s teachings deviated from his
 12 “sweet teacher” in some important ways. The younger man is dismissive of
 13 dry academic learning, which he claims nurtures vanity and egotistical ped-
 14 antry. Speculative theology, which he learned from his late master, does not
 15 interest him, but rather “good actions are, without a doubt, more instructive
 16 and uplift one’s heart somehow more than words alone.” His book, conse-
 17 quently, “describes by many examples many holy deeds that really happened
 18 as depicted.” Contrary to Meister Eckhart, Suso avoids metaphysical discus-
 19 sions (particularly anything that smacks of pantheism) and focuses on con-
 20 crete and specific ascetic instruction.

21 The *Little Book of Truth* was aimed at “anyone who would like to become
 22 a good and blessed person and share a special intimacy with God,” to which
 23 Suso added, “or whom God has singled out by severe suffering—as he is ac-
 24 customed to do with his special friends.” Like many of the nuns Eckhart
 25 counseled, his disciple reveled in corporal and psychological tribulations,
 26 enduring them in what he saw as an explicitly chivalric quest for divine wis-
 27 dom. Suso’s descriptions of his own agonies, many of them self-inflicted, are
 28 in fact reminiscent of the very path to God that Eckhart explicitly rejected.
 29 And while the master had been likewise wary of ecstatic visions and images
 30 in general, Suso recounts with relish his own “very painful” experiences,
 31 including an apparition of Meister Eckhart himself.

32 A short time later, Suso produced the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, prob-
 33S ably published not long after the pope’s official condemnation of his master.
 34N This work similarly combines Eckhartian elements of letting-go-ness and



the divine birth with conventional ascetic practices. “The more bitterly you have suffered,” Suso writes, “the more worthily you will be received.” Unlike Eckhart, who generally eschewed specific instructions and preferred to allow for multiple paths to God, Suso’s book includes four chapters teaching the reader how to live inwardly, how to receive the Eucharist, how to have a good death, and how to praise God always. While Eckhart avoided most Christ-centered devotions, Suso devotes twenty chapters to the wonder of the Passion, the supreme manifestation of God’s love for the world. So too with meditation, which the master had treated as a profoundly personal experience; Suso, by contrast, provides one hundred accessible meditative exercises with instructions.

For all his caution, Suso was one of those friars rebuked in the immediate aftermath of the papal condemnation. In 1330, he was summoned to the provincial chapter at Maastricht on charges of heresy and subsequently dismissed from his lector position in Constance. Humiliated, but unrepentant, Suso returned to Constance and began an extended period of itinerant preaching in the southern Rhine region. Here his version of Meister Eckhart’s teaching enjoyed an enthusiastic reception among many beguines, nuns, clerics, and laypeople. Calling themselves the Friends of God (based on John 15:14–15), this loosely knit network of mystical seekers gradually expanded to many cities along the Rhine, all the way up to the Netherlands. Some later historians have gone so far as to consider the Friends of God a proto-Protestant sect, but in fact it appears to have been more of an extended reading group with local chapters—and a completely orthodox one at that. All the group’s discussions of Eckhart carefully steered clear of the condemned twenty-eight articles.

It was in one of these Rhineland cities, Basel, that another Dominican and former pupil of Eckhart, Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), first encountered the Friends of God. Like Suso, Tauler had been an enthusiastic student of the master during his final years in Cologne and had continued to spread Eckhart’s “theology of the ground” as a preacher in Strasbourg. When the pro-empereur city council expelled all backers of the pope in 1339, Tauler traveled to Basel, where he reconnected with Suso and other admirers of the late Meister Eckhart. Four years later, Tauler returned to Strasbourg and soon



01 persuaded a wealthy banker, Rulman Merswin, to devote his life and for-
02 tune to the growing movement. Merswin funded many ventures and twenty
03 years later bought an abandoned monastery on the island of Grünwörth
04 near Strasbourg to serve as a retreat center for the Friends of God.

05 Together, the two protégés attempted to take custody of the master's
06 popular legacy, Suso through his elegant prose, Tauler with his powerful
07 preaching. In 1334, Suso wrote the *Clock of Wisdom*, a Latin book of mystical
08 teachings that was eventually translated into eight vernacular languages
09 and became one of the most popular spiritual writings of the Late Middle
10 Ages. Toward the end of his life he published *The Exemplar*, combining re-
11 vised versions of his earlier "little books" with some pastoral letters and an
12 autobiography, the *Life of the Servant*. In many ways, his books are more sim-
13 ilar in style to the works of female writers such as Mechthild of Magdeburg
14 and Hadewijch of Antwerp than to the scholasticism of Meister Eckhart. But
15 Suso's work served his master's memory well. Now purged of obscure and
16 dangerous statements and encased in a lyrical literary style, the teachings of
17 the master enjoyed greater popularity than they ever had during his own
18 lifetime.

19 Johannes Tauler also worked hard to make Eckhart more accessible to
20 the average person. The eighty-one of his sermons that have survived share
21 most of the master's Neoplatonist vision of divine union but present his phi-
22 losophy in very practical terms. According to Tauler, every human is divided
23 into three parts: external, internal, and highest, or most inward. The exter-
24 nal person lives by sensory perception and is compared by Tauler to a don-
25 key. The internal person, or servant, is guided by reason. But only the noblest
26 part of the person—what Eckhart called *the divine spark of the soul*—is capable
27 of uniting with God. Unlike his master, Tauler thoughtfully describes how
28 the first two persons struggle to take control and offers practical methods of
29 letting-go one can use to allow the third to prevail. Temptations by the seven
30 deadly sins—completely absent in Eckhart's sermons—also receive detailed
31 attention. Tauler's explanation of the steps to divine union is true to Eck-
32 hart, but he presents it in clear, jargon-free terms that avoid any hint of pan-
33S theism. In short, Tauler produced a less original, more conventional, but also
34N far more accessible version of his master's teachings. Implicitly, Eckhart's



backers seem to have agreed with his critics that the master's words alone were too often confusing to the average Christian. Not surprisingly, the sanitized versions of Eckhart offered by Suso and Tauler quickly overshadowed the extant sermons and writings of their "noble master."

A Light in the Medieval Darkness

Over the course of the fourteenth century, the movement later known as Rhineland mysticism gradually gave way to a new form of lay apostolic piety known as the Modern Devotion. Like the beguines, small groups of laypeople, together with some clerics, established houses that cultivated a deeper spiritual life, through communal prayer and Bible reading. Also known as Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, these intentional communities along the Rhine represented a powerful merger of the active and contemplative ideals. Many of the Modern Devotion's insights and practices were conveyed in the most popular book of the later Middle Ages—*The Imitation of Christ*, published anonymously in the early fifteenth century. The mysticism of the movement, however, had been thoroughly domesticated and purged of any controversial Eckhartian ideas, further contributing to the master's eventual disappearance as a spiritual authority.

Meister Eckhart's gradual fade into the background of Rhineland mysticism was understandable from another perspective. Despite the efforts of Suso and Tauler, his name remained dangerous throughout the fourteenth century. This was the period of greatest persecution for German beguines and beghards, who were often conflated with the Free Spirit sect, which in turn had been linked to Eckhart. Both Tauler and Suso went to great pains to distance their master from any heretical associations, but the stigma of the papal condemnation remained in the collective memory of Dominicans and other clergy.

Theologians who appropriated the master's work consequently did so only with great caution and even then usually without attribution. The one major exception to this tendency came in 1449, over a century after Eckhart's death. In his *Apology for Learned Ignorance*, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64),



01 a celebrated theologian and bishop, openly praised Meister Eckhart for his
 02 intelligence, creativity, and erudition. Nicholas was a fellow proponent of
 03 negative theology and was in awe of many of the insights garnered by his
 04 predecessor. Eckhart's mistake, he wrote, had been to preach to common
 05 people, who "are not able to understand these matters, with which he often
 06 dealt differently from other teachers, even though intelligent men will find
 07 in [his writings] many subtle and profitable things." Even then, 120 years
 08 after the papal condemnation, Nicholas was attacked by the Heidelberg
 09 theologian Johannes Wenck of Herrenberg for his "curious and vain" rein-
 10 troduction of pantheism and other past heresies. The famous bishop brushed
 11 aside such accusations and a few years later commissioned a complete copy
 12 of Eckhart's Latin works. Nicholas took the precaution, however, of making
 13 the resulting manuscript accessible only to scholars.

14 By the early sixteenth century, the Friends of God were a distant memory,
 15 Meister Eckhart was mostly forgotten, and only the writings of Suso and
 16 Tauler preserved some of the master's teachings. Some Dominican chroni-
 17 cles vaguely referred to Eckhart as a past friar of great holiness; others omit-
 18 ted him altogether. Still, Eckhart's vision of an unmediated experience of
 19 God, wherein the selfish human will was replaced with divine will, did man-
 20 age to reach some of the early proponents of what would become the Protes-
 21 tant Reformation. In 1516, the thirty-three-year-old theology professor Martin
 22 Luther was entranced by a late fourteenth-century mystical tract which he
 23 edited and published with the new name of the *Theologia Deutsch*. Luther es-
 24 pecially liked the anonymous author's description of the passive nature of
 25 conversion, although neither Luther nor the text referred explicitly to Eck-
 26 hart's letting-go-ness. The future reformer's greatest objection was that the
 27 *Theologia Deutsch* minimized the radical nature of original sin and thus de-
 28 nied God full credit for the divine birth within the soul (a transformation
 29 Luther would later called "justification"). Believing that Johannes Tauler was
 30 in fact the author, Luther asked his friend Georg Spalatin to send him a collec-
 31 tion of Tauler's sermons, which the future reformer carefully annotated.

32 It would be misleading, however, to assign more than a peripheral influ-
 33S ence to Eckhart or his disciples in the subsequent Protestant Reformation.

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Luther likely read at least a handful of Eckhart's sermons but preferred a "domesticated mysticism," remaining wary of spiritual "enthusiasts" throughout his life. The famed prophet of *sola scriptura* and "a priesthood of all believers" was no fan of untutored, individualistic interpretations of the Bible or expressions of the spirit. Protestant publications of Tauler's sermons did acknowledge Meister Eckhart as "a highly learned man," but most readers' encounters with his teaching remained indirect, via Tauler or Suso. A 1522 publication on mysticism included around seventy of Eckhart's sermons, but even then the master's impact was strongest at the margins of the new Protestant reforms, particularly among the radical reformers Andreas Bodenstein from Karlstadt, Valentin Weigel, and Sebastian Brant.

In the early seventeenth century, the Strasbourg poet Daniel Sudermann (1550–1631) rediscovered the master through Tauler and published the first partial collection of Eckhart's works, albeit to little effect. Sudermann also composed more than a thousand spiritual songs based on the writings, including "I rely on a groundless ground" and "Man, sink into your nothingness." About the same time, the "shoemaker theologian" Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) conducted a deeper exploration of Eckhart's teachings, which he interwove with other Neoplatonist, alchemical, and astrological concepts in his mystical masterwork *Aurora* (1612). But an Eckhart revival subsequently attempted by the bestselling Catholic convert Johann Scheffler (better known as Angelus Silesius, 1624–77) found no audience.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of Eckhart's obscurity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is his exclusion from the *Index of Prohibited Books*, the Catholic list of censored writings created in 1559 and regularly updated thereafter. The Counter-Reformation Catholic Church remained inordinately suspicious of mysticism, as the troubled careers of subsequently sainted Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross testify. Protestant embrace of some medieval mystics as reformers before their time—"lights in the thick darkness of medieval Christianity"—only solidified concern among Church leaders. Thus while many of Meister Eckhart's contemporaries were placed in the *Index*—Mechthild of Magdeburg, Heinrich Suso, Johannes Tauler, Jan van Ruusbroec—the master himself remained conspicuously absent.

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Intellectual Hero of the Fatherland

The modern rediscovery of Meister Eckhart began chiefly as a response to Enlightenment rationalism. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, many German intellectuals sought a new philosophy that would approach the great truths of human existence with a combination of reason and feeling, or sensibility. The “soulless materialism” and “hyper-rationalism” coming from France left such artists and poets cold, demanding in response a profound spiritual regeneration drawn from the distinctive *Geist* (spirit) of the German people. Poet Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801), better known as Novalis, captured the new “Romantic” spirit of the age in celebrating the “beautiful splendid times, when Europe was a Christian land, when *one* Christendom inhabited this humanely structured continent, *one* great communal interest united the far-flung provinces of this vast spiritual empire.” A mystical quest for life’s fulfillment was still possible in the modern world, Novalis averred, but first one had to overcome the legacy of the Enlightenment, which had “branded as heretical all imagination and feeling, placed man with difficulty at the top of the order of natural being, and turned the infinite creative music of the universe into the monotonous clattering of a gigantic mill.”

Novalis’s call for “a new humanity” was answered by the Catholic intellectual Franz von Baader (1765–1841), who came to Meister Eckhart via Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch*, both considerably better known at the time. Perusing Eckhart’s surviving German sermons, Baader discovered a profound speculative and mystical thinker, superior even to Jakob Böhme, who enjoyed a high reputation among Romantics. “Eckhart is rightly called the Master,” he wrote. “He surpasses all mystics” and had been tragically underappreciated until then. It was Baader who introduced Eckhart to the great Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who in turn incorporated the master into his 1824 lectures on the philosophy of religion. Hegel especially loved the master’s famous words on divine intersubjectivity (*The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me*), which the philosopher considered the supreme expression of self-consciousness without distinction between subject and object.



Scholarly interest in Meister Eckhart spread rapidly over the next three decades. Hegel's student Karl Rosenkranz (1805–79) dubbed him “the forefather of a specifically German philosophy” and “herald of a philosophy of the future.” Rosenkranz's praise of “German mysticism” was further promulgated by Joseph von Görres (1776–1848) in his four-volume *Christian Mysticism*, published between 1831 and 1842. Von Görres's fourth volume coincided with the appearance of the first major work devoted to Meister Eckhart by the Danish Lutheran H. L. Martensen (1808–84). Martensen not only viewed the great master as the patriarch of all German mysticism and modern idealist philosophy, but judged German mysticism itself as the highest expression of mysticism in the entire Christian tradition. In 1857, Germanist Franz Pfeiffer (1815–68) published the most complete edition ever of Eckhart's German works, including 111 sermons, 18 treatises, numerous sayings, and odd fragments. The intellectual world was abuzz with the new edition's various implications for all modern thought. Within half a century, Meister Eckhart had gone from obscure honorary Protestant to one of the most important thinkers in German history.

Meanwhile, Eckhart's new identity as the world's first idealist philosopher was quickly complicated by allegations of pantheism and even atheism. Protestant philosophers such as Karl Steffensen (1816–88) differed only on what kind of pantheism Eckhart embraced, yet extolled the medieval master's heroic resistance to the church authority of his day. In his *History of Mysticism*, Wilhelm Preger (1827–96) conceded that “the word mysticism is already its own condemnation,” but similarly acknowledged that Meister Eckhart's teachings were necessary preparation for the later Protestant Reformation. Accusations of atheism actually attracted the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who considered Eckhart the founder of transcendental idealism and was among the first admirers to note similarities to many Hindu and Buddhist ideas.

Of course admiring Catholic intellectuals rejected such heretical characterizations, but still celebrated the distinctive German identity of Eckhart and his philosophy. In his *German Mysticism in the Mendicant Orders from 1250–1350*, church historian Carl Greith (1807–82) welcomed Eckhart's approach as an antidote to the materialism of the modern era, but also



01 cautioned against the master's "daring claims, inappropriate images, and
02 ambiguous expressions that border on false doctrine." In 1886, the Domini-
03 can Heinrich Suso Denifle (1844–1905) began publishing the Latin works of
04 Meister Eckhart, hoping to counter any pantheist undertones in the German
05 sermons and to present the master as an orthodox scholastic and "one of the
06 most original thinkers of the Middle Ages." Eckhart made some errors,
07 Denifle conceded, but he remained "the father of Christian philosophy"—
08 far from the pantheist heretic portrayed by Protestant admirers.

09 The one thing that Protestant and Catholic writers could agree upon was
10 that there was something distinctively German about Meister Eckhart's bril-
11 liance. In the newly unified Second Empire (1871–1918), which had brought
12 together twenty-six formerly independent German entities, the theologian
13 from Thuringia became a source of great national pride. An influential 1904
14 article by Leopold Ziegler praised Eckhart as a genius who started a sort of
15 German Renaissance, long before the better-known Italian version. Panthe-
16 ist, heretic, proto-Protestant—the master was now a hero to a new genera-
17 tion of early twentieth-century German writers. Greatly embellished
18 portrayals of his trials in Cologne and Avignon provided the dramatic focus
19 for novels. Popular poems and songs further promoted the anti-Catholic im-
20 age of a lone warrior for truth in the benighted past. New Catholic accounts
21 of the master's orthodoxy were dismissed by Protestant critics as "unsustain-
22 able rescue efforts" for a figure undeniably closer to Luther and all things
23 truly German.

24 Only by bearing such nationalist effusions in mind can we understand
25 the incongruous and grotesque appropriation of Eckhart by the National
26 Socialists on the eve of their ascension to power. In 1930, thirty-seven-year-
27 old Nazi propagandist Alfred Rosenberg published *The Myth of the Twentieth*
28 *Century: An Assessment of the Spiritual-Psychological Paradigm Struggles of Our*
29 *Time*. Deemed unreadable even by the party faithful, Rosenberg's *Myth*
30 nonetheless provided an intellectual fig leaf for the most egregious Nazi pol-
31 icies once Hitler came to power. It described a Manichean conflict among
32 modern Germans between two worldviews: the "Roman-Syrian-Jewish-
33S Alpine" myth of Christianity and the new German myth of blood. Mixing in
34N degraded elements of Darwin and Nietzsche, Rosenberg singled out the



papacy as the architect of an insidious ideology that had enfeebled the German people for centuries but was about to be conquered by a new cosmic order based on racial supremacy. Over the next ten years the book would sell more than a million copies.

In Rosenberg's fantasy, Meister Eckhart was "the greatest apostle of the Nordic west," embodying "the greatest soul power, the most beautiful dream of the German people." All of the propagandist's information on Eckhart was second- or third-hand, with direct quotations carefully edited and inserted amid Rosenberg's rants against the Roman Church's historic attempts to poison and "Judify" the Aryan race. Eckhart was a heroic follower of Jesus who preached the freedom of the soul and will, not the sacrificial doctrine of Jewish prophecy. His work was continued by Martin Luther and other Protestant reformers, who were eventually succeeded by the Romantic poets and their cult of the individual soul—and of course the National Socialists, who would empower the German *Volkegeist* to finally conquer its alien foes.

Historians and other academics ruthlessly mocked Rosenberg's shabby scholarship, including his oversight of the seemingly pertinent fact that Eckhart had relied heavily on the teachings of the Jew Maimonides. In 1935, the Jesuit theologian Otto Karrer (1888–1976) publicly condemned Rosenberg's ahistorical portrayal of Eckhart—the *Myth* itself had been placed on the Catholic Church's *Index of Prohibited Books* the year before—then immediately fled to Switzerland, where he ~~stayed~~^{remained} until 1945. By contrast, Josef Quint (1898–1977), whose project to publish all of Eckhart's German works had just received government funding, prudently toed the party line. In 1937, Quint joined the Nazi party and two years later, in a speech as professor at the University of Breslau (Wrocław), he rejoiced that "the name Eckhart ~~had~~^{has} become a very familiar sound in all the German lands," with the "undeniable credit" going to Rosenberg and his masterwork. Now all Germans knew this "deepest and most German thinker of the past" who possessed "the unrestrained Faustian-Nordic drive for depth." Quint continued to oversee the authoritative edition of Eckhart's German works until his death nearly forty years later, while the German Dominican Josef Koch (1885–1967) assumed responsibility for the Latin works.



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The Universal Sage

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Fortunately for Meister Eckhart, most serious thinkers ignored his appropriation by German nationalists, so that his reputation suffered no harm in the eventual collapse of the Third Reich. Already in the nineteenth century, philosophers such Schopenhauer had begun to celebrate Eckhart as a universal figure of human enlightenment, far beyond a parochial source of national pride. The Dominican master's championing of intuition as a necessary complement to reason particularly resonated with Schopenhauer's interpretation of "metaphysical will." Similarly, Eckhart's description of subjectivity during the divine birth for many twentieth-century philosophers anticipated the "modern discovery of the self," evident in the antipositivist systems constructed by René Descartes (1596–1650), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Karl Jaspers (1883–1969). His just man, *living without a why*, is the embodiment of the authentic life embraced by existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80). The postmodern deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) wrote at length about the themes of *letting-go-ness* and *living without a why*, exploring the limitations of language even in Eckhart's own negative theology. In short, virtually all modern continental philosophers acknowledged some debt to the revolutionary approach of Meister Eckhart six centuries earlier.

No twentieth-century philosopher drew more directly on Eckhart than Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), one of the founders of phenomenology. Heidegger believed that reality was best understood through the individual subjective experience of the world's phenomena and that "representationalist" thinking was itself delusional. Scientific calculative approaches to being and reality consistently favored their own technological agendas, simultaneously revealing and hiding the world. Meister Eckhart's *letting-go-ness*, by contrast, opened up the thinker to a transcendent, direct experience of reality ("Being") itself. The "old Master of Learning and of Living" had long ago perceived the limitations of human reason and developed an alternative, contemplative access to the mystery of existence.



Of course the unspoken assumption among Heidegger and other twentieth-century philosophers, all of them agnostics or atheists, was that Eckhart's insights needed to be extracted from their original and outdated religious context. The master's unknowable God had been categorized by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) as an infantile human projection, at best “the dark self-perception of the realm beyond the ego, of the id.” Freud and his fellow psychiatrists typically considered mystics as neurotic individuals suffering from morbid or hysterical personalities, accentuated by self-hypnosis. Some modern admirers of Eckhart have consequently resisted characterizing the master as a mystic and instead, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, pay Meister Eckhart the ultimate compliment of treating him like a secular contemporary, freed from the shackles of medieval religiosity.

Yet as the scholars Amy Hollywood and Ben Morgan have pointed out, modern theoretical appropriations of Eckhart's teachings have invariably interpreted them as manifestations of something other than what their author intended. This approach does not necessarily invalidate these theorists' arguments, but it does distort the historical Eckhart, who was in fact motivated by a religious vision. It also tends to patronize the man, suggesting that he apparently did not appreciate the true significance of what he was saying. How can it be that the prophet of “modern subjectivity” displayed so little concern about questions of individual autonomy and agency in describing the effects of the divine birth? It appears that Eckhart's appeal as a universal philosophical figure has less to do with the totality of his approach than with the useful parts contained therein.

Even Meister Eckhart's greatest admirer among twentieth-century theorists believed that the master's religious language could be misleading. Contrary to his former mentor Freud's dismissal of all so-called religious experiences, psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) proclaimed that “it is to the mystics that we owe what is best in humanity.” When searching for inroads to the “deep psyche,” Jung found that “only in Meister Eckhart did I feel the breath of life.” “The art of letting things happen,” he wrote, “action through non-action, letting go of oneself, as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key opening the door to the way.” For Jung, Eckhart's

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01 fathomless abyss of the Godhead was nothing other than the unconscious,
 02 the soul what he called the libido (not in the modern sexual sense), and the
 03 divine birth “a state of intense vitality,” during which “God disappears as an
 04 object [and becomes] a subject which is no longer distinguishable from the
 05 ego.” This intersubjectivity, also appreciated by Heidegger, was the focus of
 06 a chapter in Jung’s influential *Psychological Types* (1921), where he described
 07 Eckhart’s pivotal insight of “a reciprocal and essential relation between man
 08 and God, whereby man can be understood as a function of God and God as
 09 a psychological function of man.” Jung’s secular adaptation of Eckhart’s reli-
 10 gious philosophy is certainly among the most coherent modern interpreta-
 11 tions, but is it one that the master himself would have appreciated?

12 Of course Eckhart’s greatest appeal should be to modern Christians, but
 13 this has not always been a straightforward matter. Roman Catholics have
 14 always been attentive to the “dangerous” parts of the master’s teaching, par-
 15 ticularly those sermons on the Godhead that appear pantheistic. Eckhart’s
 16 brief appropriation by the Nazi regime did him no favors among Catholics in
 17 the Reich or abroad, despite the Vatican’s consistent rejection of such an as-
 18 sociation. Only in recent decades, especially since the endorsement of the
 19 famous monk Thomas Merton (1915–68), have Eckhart’s writings gained a
 20 broader public among Catholics, including the last three popes. In 1986, an
 21 Eckhart commission set up by the Dominican master concluded that “on the
 22 basis of our studies it is already clear to us that a reconsideration of the teach-
 23 ing of Meister Eckhart is justified.” The order’s 1992 request to the then head
 24 of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
 25 (later Pope Benedict XVI), was not answered until 2010, when Master Timo-
 26 thy Radcliffe explained:

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 28 We tried to have the censure lifted on Eckhart . . . and were told that
 29 there was really no need since he had never been condemned by name,
 30 just some propositions which he was supposed to have held, and so we
 31 are perfectly free to say that he is a good and orthodox theologian.

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 33S This response, if accurate, is a far cry from rescinding *In agro dominico*, let
 34N alone proclaiming Meister Eckhart a Doctor of the Church. Perhaps the



magisterium still considers the master's dramatic language too vulnerable to misinterpretation by the faithful. 01
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Despite Eckhart's longtime reputation as an honorary Protestant and his enthusiastic reception among nineteenth-century Romantics and Idealists, mainstream Protestants, particularly German Lutherans, have been slower to embrace the master fully because of his association with "Catholic" mysticism. The great church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) proclaimed that "mysticism can never be made Protestant without slapping history and Catholicism in the face." As theologian Karl Barth (1886–1969) argued, mysticism propagates a path to salvation "that completely bypasses the biblical history of salvation and the Last Days." Since the 1960s, Protestant believers have been worried less by the Catholic context of Meister Eckhart and other mystics than by the latter's growing association with several New Age—and presumably unscriptural—approaches to enlightenment. That cautiousness continues today, although many American Protestants, including evangelicals, are increasingly discovering worthwhile spiritual insights in the words of the medieval master. 03
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Most commonly since the mid-twentieth century, the master has been praised as a bridge to Asian religions and philosophies. In his correspondence with Thomas Merton, Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) called Eckhart "the one Zen thinker of the West." The just man's inner Christ nature described by the medieval master looks remarkably similar to the internal Buddha nature of Mahayana tradition, as does Eckhart's combination of the contemplative-active life of love. Letting-go-ness lines up nicely with the Zen "no-mind" (*wuxin*) as well as the Taoist "no action" (*wuwei*). The Buddha also remained wary of human God-talk and aspired to a unity with the ultimate similar to Eckhart's deification. The many resemblances are indeed striking. 18
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Several modern observers have also noted Meister Eckhart's kinship with parts of the Hindu tradition, particularly the Advaita Vedanta school. The Tamil writer Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) exclaimed that "Eckhart's Sermons might well be termed an Upanishad of Europe," noting the master's "astonishingly close parallel to Indian modes of thought; some whole passages and many single sentences read like a direct translation from 29
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01 Sanskrit.” Here too, some Eckhartian terms seem to have other religious
 02 equivalents, such as Brahman for the ground, and *neti neti* (not this, not this)
 03 for the ineffability of the divine mystery. Above all, both Eckhart and the
 04 Vedanta school emphasize the necessity of intuition to experience the en-
 05 tirety of reality, which then leads to loving kindness.

06 Both Islam and Judaism also have their own strong mystical tradi-
 07 tions and here too many notable similarities to Meister Eckhart’s teachings
 08 emerge. Like Eckhart, his near contemporary, the great Sufi master Ibn
 09 Arabi (1165–1240) sought a religious philosophy that would above all be prac-
 10 tical for genuine spiritual seekers. His Perfect Human, like Eckhart’s Just
 11 Man, has realized the divinity within—the inseparableness from the divine
 12 essence in the eternal Now—and has dedicated himself or herself to a life of
 13 perfect love. The fantastically popular Sufi poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207–73)
 14 prefigures his Christian counterpart’s language and message even more
 15 strikingly. With evocative images and meticulously crafted phrasing, Rumi
 16 describes his own relentless pursuit of union (*fanā*) with “the Beloved.” The
 17 experience of this mystery, which most non-Sufis reject as heretical, is like
 18 no other. Coincidentally, a Jewish contemporary of Eckhart and Rumi, the
 19 mystic and philosopher Abraham Abulafia (1240–91), taught a similar kind
 20 of divine union, known as meditative Kabbalahism, which remains likewise
 21 controversial among modern Jews.

22 Meister Eckhart’s seemingly universal applicability among the virtually
 23 all the world’s religions accounts for his particular popularity in the rapidly
 24 growing belief in religious syncretism, also known as perennialism (and
 25 sometimes religious pluralism). This is the conviction that all the world’s
 26 religions share a common essential truth, which has since been fractured
 27 into various rituals, doctrines, and other structures. Given that Meister Eck-
 28 hart in fact sought such a universal religious philosophy, it’s little surprise
 29 that he has proven such a superstar among its adherents. The Neoplatonist
 30 Agostino Steuco (1497–1545) coined “perennial philosophy” to describe a
 31 common, transcendent truth evident in both classical Greek philosophy and
 32 later religious traditions. Steuco’s idea lay largely dormant until spreading
 33S among the Deists of the eighteenth century and even more spectacularly
 34N among the Transcendentalists, Universalists, and Theosophists of the nine-



teenth century. In 1945, Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) published *The Perennial Philosophy*, in which Eckhart plays a prominent role, taking the universalist perspective into popular culture. Since then, perennialism has become closely associated with various New Age writers as well as some ecumenists among Christian denominations.

At least on the surface, Eckhart could qualify as the patron saint of the perennial movement. Like its modern advocates, he rejected the materialism of human society to seek a hidden, spiritual truth. He was also remarkably inclusive in his sources for past wisdom, consulting not just Christian thinkers, but also Jews, Muslims, and ancient pagans. Although a Christian (and member of the clergy!), he stressed individual, internal transformation over external rituals or doctrines. His approach was egalitarian, not requiring a high degree of learning or other special gnosis. And above all, his sermons were practical and encouraging, full of colorful metaphors, memorable aphorisms, and answers to anticipated questions. There was but one goal, union with God, which modern followers refer to as ultimate reality—and Eckhart would not disagree with the characterization.

Was Meister Eckhart a perennialist before his time? At first glance, the resemblance to a modern spiritual teacher, such as his namesake Eckhart Tolle (b. 1945), is quite striking. Tolle's earliest mystical influence was the prolific German writer Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken (aka Bô Yin Râ; 1876–1943), a profound admirer of Jakob Böhme, who in turn was of course shaped by his reading of Meister Eckhart. Although Tolle only explicitly mentions the master a few times, the influence of the medieval sage is pervasive. In *The Power of Now* (1999), Tolle writes at length of both mindfulness and surrendering (letting go of) the “false self,” so as to experience “the Source” (ground) and “the Unmanifested” (silent, apophatic God) in “the eternal Now.” “The One” who existed before the Big Bang similarly is present in the “isness” of all things, including of course humans. Like the master, Tolle teaches that experiencing the divine essence within will transform the seeker, leading to a life of joy and compassion. He also skillfully anticipates a reader's potential questions within the text and provides reassuring answers.

But appearances can be misleading. Tolle's main goal—and this accounts in large part for his popular success—is therapeutic: healing the “pain body”



01 of its “negativity,” typically manifested in addictions and unhappy relation-
 02 ships. His “timeless wisdom” draws on an impressive all-star cast—the Bud-
 03 dha, the Tao Te Ching, Jesus, ²Rumi, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Marcus
 04 Aurelius, the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, and so on. His prose is straightfor-
 05 ward, conversational, and mixes in contemporary references from movies
 06 and popular music. At times he translates his points into “theistic language,”
 07 but he carefully avoids—in good perennialist fashion—endorsing any spec-
 08 ific religious doctrines. “Salvation” consists of freedom from “the psycho-
 09 logical need of the past for your identity and future for your fulfillment.” In
 10 language reminiscent of Meister Eckhart, Tolle explains:

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 12 *You find God the moment you realize that you don't need to seek God. So*
 13 *there is no only way to salvation: Any condition can be used, but no partic-*
 14 *ular condition is needed. However, there is only one point of access: the Now.*
 15 *There can be no salvation away from this moment. You are lonely and with-*
 16 *out a partner? Enter the Now from there. You are in a relationship? Enter the*
 17 *now from there.*

Rumi

Not in
 Italics



18
 19 Not only will such a transformation bring inner peace, we are told, it will
 20 strengthen the immune system and slow down the aging process.

21 To be fair, Tolle never claims to be the modern incarnation of Meister
 22 Eckhart. But his indirect, secularized, self-help application of the master's
 23 insights is currently making more inroads than any other representation,
 24 particularly among the growing number of “spiritual but not religious” indi-
 25 viduals in the West. Like the philosophers of the twentieth century, contem-
 26 porary spiritual teachers such as Tolle unquestionably bring the teachings of
 27 Meister Eckhart to a wider audience, but also like these predecessors, they
 28 extract him from his original religious context, intentionally disregarding or
 29 reconfiguring some of his distinctly Christian interpretations.

30 Appropriation of this latest nature is an inherent risk to every public
 31 thinker, although Eckhart seems to have endured more than his fair share of
 32 diverse interpretations and applications over the years. An optimist could
 33S say that this result is a tribute to the rich, transcendent nature of his teach-
 34N ing. A pessimist might counter that it is the frequent ambiguity and obscu-



rity of the master's words that have condemned him to such a fate. A historian can concede that while both views have merit, Eckhart died convinced that he had neither said nor written anything contrary to the Catholic faith—"insofar as" he understood it. The fate of those teachings, he believed, was in the hands of a just God, just like the outcome of his own lifelong quest to be united with that God in eternity.

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{ CHAPTER TEN }

The Wayless Way

Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden. But whoever seeks for God without ways will find him as he is in Himself, and that man will live with the Son, and he is life itself.

GERMAN SERMON 5B

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Making Room for God

During Meister Eckhart's ten years in Strasbourg and subsequent four years in Cologne, he preached his "method" of divine union to thousands of people—nuns, beguines, and fellow friars, but also craft workers, bankers, merchants, lawyers, soldiers, parish priests, farmers, servants, widows, manual laborers, and assorted travelers, including pilgrims. He spoke to congregations in the Dominican churches of both cities, as well as male and female cloisters and other churches up and down the Rhine that invited him. He also counseled interested individuals privately, often as a confessor. The German sermons that have survived from this period, in fact, were meticulously transcribed by some of his devoted followers and in some instances edited by the master himself before circulation.

In recasting his religious philosophy for an audience of average men and women, Meister Eckhart distinguished himself from other preachers in some notable ways. Unlike the typical Dominican or Franciscan friar, he did





01 not dwell in his sermons on sin and its eternal punishment in the torments
 02 of hell. He did not tell colorful anecdotes about the saints, like Berthold of
 03 Regensburg, or entertaining morality tales about religious scoffers who get
 04 their comeuppance in the end. There is, in fact, little drama or humor in the
 05 sermons that have survived. Nor were there any prophetic visions or de-
 06 scriptions of eternal bliss in an extended description of heaven. For those
 07 listeners seeking sensations of remorse or joy, let alone diversion of any sort,
 08 Eckhart would have been an acute disappointment.

09 At the same time, the Dominican master had one major draw that few if
 10 any of his contemporaries could match: he offered to show people how to
 11 directly experience God. The hunger for authentic and unmediated experi-
 12 ence of the divine remained as strong in the early fourteenth century as it
 13 had been a hundred years earlier. People of all backgrounds continued to
 14 seek out God in the midst of their lives and in the religious options before
 15 them. Thanks to his impeccable scholarly credentials, Meister Eckhart en-
 16 joyed the authority to describe in poetic language the practical steps that led
 17 to divine union, or what he sometimes daringly called “becoming God.”
 18 Seekers had to be willing to engage with his intellectually challenging—
 19 some might say impenetrable—way of speaking. But for those who perse-
 20 vered, the usual stories from the pulpit about dismembered martyrs paled in
 21 comparison.

22 Not that Meister Eckhart was the first preacher of his day to discuss *ways*
 23 *into God*. In his own sermons he identified two widely acknowledged meth-
 24 ods, which he contrasted with his own “third way.” *One [way] is to seek God in*
 25 *all creatures with manifold activity and ardent longing*. The most famous recent
 26 advocate of this *via positiva* was St. Bonaventure, like Eckhart a learned theo-
 27 logian and admirer of St. Augustine as well as a mendicant administrator.
 28 Bonaventure, though, was a Franciscan who embraced the affective piety of
 29 his order’s founder, in which one began by loving the created world and
 30 other humans and progressed to loving the Creator Himself. In his *Soul’s*
 31 *Journey to God*, Bonaventure described—in Latin and chiefly for his fellow
 32 Franciscans—six successive levels of illumination, beginning with the ap-
 33S prehension and perception of beauty in nature and fellow humans by the
 34N physical senses, followed by intellectual and spiritual contemplation up the



ladder of creation, and culminating in an encounter with the divine source of all. This approach appealed to many Christians of the day and was expanded upon in such instructional works as David of Augsburg's *Seven Stages of Prayer* and Rudolf of Biberach's *Seven Roads of Eternity*. Dante Alighieri was its most famous contemporary proponent and his *Divine Comedy* the most enduring dramatization of the pathway to God through ever-expanding love.

While never impugning Bonaventure or any of his fellow Franciscans by name, Meister Eckhart rejected seeking God through the external world and senses. The Creator was in all things, he agreed, but He could not be directly encountered in this way. Human will, as he had argued against the Franciscan Gonsalvo in Paris, too readily attached itself to images and intermediaries, preventing genuine access to the divine. Even poverty, the supreme virtue of the Franciscans, could become an idol. Preaching on the feast of St. Francis, Eckhart directly challenged his rival mendicants on this score, arguing, *I used sometimes to say (and it is quite true) that whoever truly loves poverty is so desirous of it that he grudges anyone having less than he has. And so it is with all things, whether it is purity, or justice, or whatever virtue he loves, he wants to have to the highest degree.* Rather than look to the created world, *He who would see God must be blind.* Rather than seeking God's voice in the conversation of men, *anyone who wishes to hear God speaking must become deaf and inattentive to others.*

The second way into God was through an ecstatic episode, such as the rapture of St. Paul, who wrote of "a man [who] was caught up and heard such words as may not be uttered by men" (2 Corinthians 12:2). Experience of this nature was a rare gift, bestowed only on a select few throughout the Church's history, perhaps including certain contemporary nuns and beguines. This way, however, like that of Bonaventure, yielded only an external and partial view of God. *You should understand,* explained Eckhart, *that in a similar ecstatic experience St. Peter stood on the circle of eternity, but was not in unity beholding God in His own being.* In other words, there was no full union between the seeker and the divine, no direct experience of God's essence.

The third way, the master concluded, *is called a way, but is really being at home, that is: seeing God without means in His own being. . . . Outside of this way*



01 *all creatures circle and are means. But led into God on this way by the light of His*
 02 *Word and embraced by them both in the Holy Spirit—that passes all words. This*
 03 *third way—not really a way—offered much more than either affective piety*
 04 *or special revelations could ever promise, and, unlike those two paths, Eck-*
 05 *hart’s third way was accessible to all seekers. How marvelous, to be without and*
 06 *within, to embrace and be embraced, to see and be the seen, to hold and be held—*
 07 *that is the goal, where the spirit is ever at rest, united in joyous eternity! Such com-*
 08 *plete immersion in the Godhead, according to Eckhart, was the ultimate*
 09 *transformative experience sought by all humans.*

10 But how could the seeker *be at home* in this way? *Is it better to do something*
 11 *toward this, to imagine and to think about God?—or should he keep still and silent*
 12 *in peace and quiet and let God speak and work in him, merely waiting for God to*
 13 *act?* Here Meister Eckhart is at his most innovative, providing genuine in-
 14 struction but at the same time arguing against a formulaic striving for God.
 15 He depicts, rather, a kind of anti-striving, in which the individual progres-
 16 sively lets go of all the impediments to divine union and then awaits *the di-*
 17 *vine birth*, an event of pure grace. This is the process of *letting-go-ness*, the
 18 approach that Eckhart first identified as prior in Erfurt and refined over the
 19 course of the next twenty years.

20 Where Bonaventure and other Franciscans wrote of gradually elevating
 21 the soul to God, Eckhart preached of stripping the soul down to its bare es-
 22 sence. God was not to be found “out there,” but within. As in his reading of
 23 the Bible, Eckhart worked as a spiritual excavator, going deep below the
 24 surface of things to get at the core truth that was God. When Jesus preached
 25 “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3), he did not just mean the phys-
 26 ically destitute but the internally liberated individual *who wants nothing,*
 27 *knows nothing, and has nothing.* The ultimate preparation for an experience of
 28 the divine birth was not the accumulation of good deeds and knowledge but
 29 rather a self-emptying of all images and desires—even the desire for God—a
 30 radical letting-go of virtually every aspect of individual identity that verged
 31 on self-annihilation.

32 Such complete *detachment* or *cutting away* (MHG *abgescheidenheit*) had
 33S been the goal of Christian monks and nuns for over a millennium. Tradition
 34N dictated that achieving it required many years of sacrifice and suffering, and





the inexhaustible resilience to rebound from countless personal setbacks. Yet Meister Eckhart reassured his listeners that to reach this state of total detachment *all you need is right intention and free will*. With such a pronouncement, he seems to embrace the kind of easy piety that foes of the new apostolic movements feared and condemned. *No one should think it is hard to come to this, even though it sounds hard and a great matter. It is true that it is a little difficult in the beginning in becoming detached. But when one has got into it, no life is easier, more delightful or lovelier.* Moreover, Eckhart claimed, any sincere believer, regardless of status, could succeed:

And so I say again, as I said before, there is no one here so coarse-grained, so ignorant, or unprepared but if, by the grace of God, he can unite his will purely and totally with the will of God, then he need only say with desire, "Lord, show me your dearest will and strengthen me to do it!" and God will do so as truly as he lives.

But what Meister Eckhart assumes—though he clarifies it less frequently—is that his listeners have already internalized the teachings of conventional piety and conformed their lives accordingly:

Now I say, as I said before, that these words and this act are only for the good and perfected people, who have so absorbed and assimilated the essence of all virtues that these virtues emanate from them naturally, without their seeking; and above all there must dwell in them the worthy life and lofty teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before one can transcend traditional piety, one must have absorbed its values as second nature. Nonetheless, seekers should never confuse the means of piety with its ends. *If anyone were to ask me, Why do we pray, why do we fast, why do we do all our works, why are we baptized, why (most important of all) did God become man?—I would answer, in order that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God. For this reason all the scriptures were written and for that reason God created the world and all angelic natures.*

The advanced seeker has already completed three of *the four steps into God*





01 described by Eckhart. *The first is that fear, hope, and desire grow in [the soul]. In*
 02 *the beginning of the good life, the master concedes, even fear is useful to a man*
 03 *and gives him access to love. Similarly, for a man to have a peaceful life is good, but*
 04 *for a man to have a life of pain in patience is better; but that a man should have peace*
 05 *in a life of pain is best. Only then can the soul take the second step, where fear*
 06 *and hope and desire are quite cut off, before coming to the third stage . . . a forget-*
 07 *fulness of all temporary things. In that sense, all—or virtually all—conventional*
 08 *Christian teachings and practices formed the prelude to the divine union*
 09 *Eckhart preached. The ultimate goal of these preliminary stages, as he had*
 10 *stressed to Dominican novices, was humility, which makes a man greatest of*
 11 *all: whoever has this most deeply and perfectly has the possibility of gaining all per-*
 12 *fection. His sermons were aimed at those people who had already attained*
 13 *this deep level of humility, individuals who considered themselves pious*
 14 *Christians but hungered for more. For such men and women, he promised,*
 15 *divine union was a short step away; for those still immersed in selfish lives,*
 16 *Eckhart offered no quick fix. Unfortunately this was a key distinction that a*
 17 *casual listener—or inquisitor—might miss.*

18 The remaining challenge for advanced believers, according to Eckhart,
 19 was letting go of their own piety, at least as a source of pride or self-esteem.
 20 The only acceptable objective is to know God, and this must be a pure and
 21 selfless desire. *The just man seeks nothing in his works: for those who seek any-*
 22 *thing in their works or work for any “why” are thralls and hirelings. . . . Indeed, even*
 23 *if you create an image of God in your mind the works you do with that in view are*
 24 *dead and your good works are ruined. At one point Eckhart explicitly addresses*
 25 *the self-identified godly in his audience, all those who are bound with attach-*
 26 *ment to prayer, fasting, vigils, and all kinds of outward discipline and mortifica-*
 27 *tion, pleading with them to sever*

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 29 *all attachment to any work that involves the loss of freedom to wait on God*
 30 *in the here and now, and to follow Him alone in the light wherein He would*
 31 *show you what to do and what not to do, every moment freely and anew, as*
 32 *if you had nothing else and neither would nor could do otherwise . . . for*
 33S *otherwise you will have no peace.*

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The same purity of intention applied to prayer. *Anyone who desires something from God is a merchant*—the ultimate put-down for his pious listeners. 01
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If one prays for [anything] but God alone, that can be called idolatry or unrighteousness. . . . When I pray for nobody and for nothing, then I am praying most truly, for God is neither Heinrich nor Conrad. If we pray to God for [anything] else but God, that is wrong and faithless and a kind of imperfection, for it is to set up something beside God. 03
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Petitionary prayer, in Eckhart's eyes, was both foolish and selfish: *If you are sick and pray to God for health, then health is dearer to you than God, and He is not your God.* From the divine perspective, Eckhart preached, the great majority of individual requests were also ridiculously petty, as he illustrated with a contemporary analogy: 09
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Suppose I came to the pope a hundred or two hundred miles and when I came into his presence I were to say, "My lord, Holy Father, I have traveled about two hundred miles with great difficulty and expense, and I beg you—and this is what I came for—to give me a bean;" truly, he and whoever heard it would say, and rightly, that I was a great fool. 15
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Even noble requests, ostensibly bringing one closer to God, stumbled over themselves and became substitutions for what should be the sole objective. 21
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Anyone who seeks anything in God, knowledge, understanding, devotion, or whatever it might be—though he may find it he will not have found God: even though he may indeed find knowledge, understanding, or inwardness, which I heartily recommend—but it will not stay with him. But if he seeks nothing, he will find God and all things in Him, and they will remain with him. 25
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Letting go of the image of God as a heavenly wish granter was no easy matter, especially given how deeply ingrained this idea was in the 31
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01 Christianity of the day. Yet according to Eckhart, this prevailing attitude
 02 constituted a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of both God and
 03 prayer. *Looking for something with God [is] treating God like a candle with which*
 04 *to look for something; and when you have found what you were looking for, you*
 05 *throw the candle away.*

06 *The most powerful prayer, he revealed, one well-nigh omnipotent to gain all*
 07 *things, and the noblest work of all is that which proceeds from a bare mind. Only*
 08 *when the seeker had made his or her mind free (MHG *ledic, vri, lûter, blôz*) of*
 09 *all images, literally un-pictured (*entbildet*), could he or she learn, firstly, how to*
 10 *pray to God. . . . for God is above names and ineffable. In other words, the seeker*
 11 *should pray for union with a mysterious, imageless God, not the anthropo-*
 12 *morphized old man with a beard or any other imagined being. Yet ironically,*
 13 *the master provides one particularly memorable image to convey the image-*
 14 *less encounter: Strip God of all his clothing—seize Him naked in his robing room,*
 15 *where He is uncovered and bare in Himself. Then you will “abide in Him.”*

16 The gap between this God of the scholastics and the God of most people
 17 was considerable. Transcending the divine images that saturated fourteenth-
 18 century Christianity represented a formidable challenge that was probably
 19 beyond the average churchgoer. Yet according to Meister Eckhart only those
 20 seekers who were willing to let go of all the conventional structures of
 21 religion—to let them fall away like obsolete scaffolding—could be truly
 22 open to the divine birth within. *Whatever is familiar to you is your foe, he*
 23 *warned. Even the focus on “God” Himself prevented the seeker from experi-*
 24 *encing the infinite ground of being beyond the human idea of the Creator,*
 25 *leading Eckhart to make the seemingly shocking proclamation, therefore I*
 26 *pray to God to make me free of God, for my essential being is above God, where God*
 27 *is understood as the origin of creatures.*

28 The final and perhaps greatest barrier to the divine birth within was the
 29 self, what we would today call the ego. *Cease to be this or that, he advised, and*
 30 *to have this and that. Our Lord, Eckhart reminded his listeners, says, “He who*
 31 *would be my disciple must abandon self;” none can hear my words or my teaching,*
 32 *unless he has abandoned self. Yet how few otherwise pious seekers were able to*
 33S *accomplish this feat! It is lamentable how some people think themselves very lofty*
 34N *and quite one with God, and yet have not abandoned self, and cling to such petty*



things in joy and sorrow. They are a long way from where they imagine themselves to be. Eckhart compared a seeker who continued to hold on to his or her personal identity to a sick man with a thick coating on his tongue, who is unable to really taste food or wine: *As long as you mind yourself or anything at all, you know no more of God than my mouth knows of color or my eye of taste.*

When some of his listeners expressed frustration to Meister Eckhart that they had practiced worldly detachment yet received *no inwardness nor devotion nor rapture nor any special consolation from God*, he admonished them that they were still not letting go of all that is not God. *If you would know truth clearly*, Boethius had counseled, *you must cast off joy, and fear, and expectation, and hope, and pain.* Each of these attitudes, Eckhart explained, was a means, and thus an impediment to experiencing the divine directly. Similarly, *memory, understanding, and will, they all diversify you, and therefore you must leave them all: sense perceptions, imagination, or whatever it may be in which you find or seek to find yourself.* After that, *you may find this birth, but not otherwise—believe me! Do not imagine*, the master added, *that your reason can grow to the knowledge of God. If God is to shine divinely in you, your natural light cannot help toward this end.* Human reason, to the contrary, often posed additional barriers to the divine experience.

The way to reach God, in short, was to stop pursuing Him, at least with the intellect and all its desires, *for as long as you want more and more, God cannot dwell or work in you.* Occasionally Eckhart seemed to approach the heretical self-annihilation described by Marguerite Porete: *therefore a man must be slain and wholly dead, devoid of self and wholly without likeness, like to none, and then he is really God-like.* But “destroying the old man” was a perennial Christian theme. What was novel was the apparent prioritizing of a radical internal “poverty” over external poverty—a difficult goal but one accessible to all seekers. Meister Eckhart sympathized with popular reactions to such greater spiritual demands but was unwavering on their necessity:

A man once came to me—it was not long ago—and told me he had given up a great deal of property and goods, in order that he might save his soul. Then I thought, Alas! How little and how paltry are the things you have given up. It is blindness and folly, so long as you care a jot for what you have given up. But if you have given up self, then you have really given up.



01 The true seeker must therefore be intrepid and continue forward in the
02 midst of doubts.

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The Divine Birth

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In all a man does he should turn his will Godward and, keeping God alone in mind forge ahead without qualms about its being the right thing or whether he is making a mistake. If a painter had to plan every brush-stroke with the first, he would paint nothing.

Meister Eckhart's mature understanding of *letting-go-ness* was comprehensive. Not only must the sinner let go of the world and sin, but also of all the traditional remedies proposed by the Church: pious acts of devotion and petitionary prayer aimed at flawed human notions of "God." The seeker had to let go of all images, desires, and thought itself. Only then was he or she ready for the final step in Eckhart's way to God, which is *to be silent and let God work and speak within*. Typically, the seeker was *more aware of God . . . in a quiet place*, but that requirement, Eckhart clarified, reflected human imperfection more than divine nature, *for God is equally in all things and places*. Most important, he continued,

all your activity must cease and all your powers must serve [God's] ends, not your own. . . . No creaturely skill, nor your own wisdom nor all your knowledge can enable you to know God divinely. For you to know God in God's way, your knowing must become a pure unknowing, and a forgetting of yourself and all creatures.

Now you might say, "Well sir, what use is my intellect then, if it is supposed to be empty and functionless? Is that the best thing for me to do—to raise my mind to an unknowing knowledge that can't really exist? For if I knew anything at all it would not be ignorance, and I should not be empty and bare. Am I supposed to be in total darkness?"

Certainly. You cannot do better than to place yourself in darkness and in unknowing.



Eckhart knew well the potential terror of such an internal state, without rules, directions, goals, or other points of reference. *Sir, you place all of our salvation in ignorance!* But the master remained adamant, demanding the leap of faith that would allow God to enter.

Now you might say, "Oh sir, is it really always necessary to be barren and estranged from everything, outward and inward . . . if a man is in such a state of pure nothingness, is it not better to do something to beguile the gloom and desolation, such as praying and listening to sermons or doing something else that is virtuous, so as to help himself?"

No, be sure of this. Absolute stillness for as long as possible is best of all for you. You cannot exchange this state for any other without harm. That is certain. You would like to partly prepare yourself and partly let God prepare you, but this cannot be.

There was no turning back from this ultimate letting-go, the culminating point of existence, *and if you give way to the impulse to turn back, you are bound to lapse into sin, and you may backslide so far as to fall eternally.*

These are unexpectedly harsh words from the normally encouraging master. How could he be so certain that such self-emptying would lead to the desired divine union? The answer lay in Eckhart's understanding of the very nature of the soul and its intrinsic link to the divine.

I have a power in my soul which is ever receptive to God. I am as certain [of that] as that I am a man, that nothing is so close to me as God. God is closer to me than I am to myself: my being depends on God's being near me and present to me.

This power is variously named by Eckhart as *the divine light of the soul, the head of the soul, the husband of the soul, the guardian of the spirit, the light of the spirit, the imprint of divine nature, a citadel, a tiny drop of intellect, a twig, and, most famously, a little spark.* The masters, he notes, *say this [power] is nameless, and indeed Eckhart concedes that it is neither this nor that; and yet it is something that is more exalted over "this" and "that" than are the heavens above the*



01 earth. It is *uncreated and uncreatable, a piece of divine and celestial nature*. This
 02 power alone is free, and it touches neither time nor flesh, flowing from the spirit,
 03 remaining in the spirit, altogether spiritual. Like its divine source, this power
 04 knows neither time nor other human distinctions, such as *here and now*.

05 Eckhart's descriptions of *the divine spark* harken back to his longtime
 06 search for a universal religious philosophy. Pagan and Christian sages alike,
 07 he believed, particularly those influenced by Neoplatonism, had long recog-
 08 nized this elusive spiritual core in all human beings and struggled to pin
 09 down its nature.

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11 *There is a fine saying of one pagan master to another about this. He said, "I*
 12 *am aware of something in me which shines in my understanding; I can clearly*
 13 *perceive that it is something, but what it may be I cannot grasp. Yet I think if*
 14 *I could only seize it I should know all truth."* To which the other master re-
 15 *plied, "Follow it boldly! For if you could seize it you would possess the sum*
 16 *total of all good and have eternal life! St. Augustine spoke in the same sense:*
 17 *'I am aware of something within me that gleams and flashes before my soul;*
 18 *were this perfected and fully established in me, that would surely be eter-*
 19 *nal life!'*



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21 The entire point of radical self-emptying and letting-go was to eliminate
 22 the mental noise and other distractions that obscured this power, which nat-
 23 urally sought out *the sweetest, the highest, the best*. The theological term for
 24 this power, Eckhart explained, was *synteresis* (Greek "careful watching"),
 25 what we today might call the moral compass, or more simply the conscience.
 26 It was the part of the soul that always pointed toward God but was often
 27 drowned out by selfish desires. Eckhart compared the liberated *divine spark*
 28 to the flame of a candle, burning brightly and more clearly the farther it
 29 springs from the wick.

30 Ironically, the "imageless" preacher relied on several metaphors to con-
 31 vey the ideal precondition of the soul necessary for the divine spark to
 32 achieve its end. One was the absolute silence necessary to hear the Word, the
 33S creative work of God.

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The heavenly Father speaks one Word and speaks it eternally, and in the Word He expends all His might and utters His entire divine nature and all creatures in the Word. The Word lies hidden in the soul, unnoticed and unheard unless room is made for it in the ground of hearing, otherwise it is not heard; but all voices and all sounds must cease and perfect stillness must reign there, a still silence.

The nature of a word is to reveal what is hidden, Eckhart preaches, which is why the author of the book of Wisdom (18:14–15) wrote, “In the middle of the night when all things were in a quiet silence, there was spoken to me a hidden word. It came like a thief by stealth.” This secret and hidden word (verbum absconditum) is in fact the Word, the divine logos of creation embodied in Christ, which when “heard” joins the Creator and creature in complete union. It is the voice crying out in the wilderness (Matthew 3:3), the sole source of hope in the inner desert generated by the seeker.

Another favored representation of the soul before union was the image of complete darkness. Only when the soul is deprived of all images can the simple, pure light of the divine spark be perceived. Here Eckhart sides with the description of divine illumination offered by Pseudo-Dionysius:

Anything you see, or anything that comes within your ken, that is not God, just because God is neither this nor that. Whoever says God is here or there, do not believe him. The light that God is shines in the darkness. God is the true light: to see it, one must be blind and must strip from God all that is “something.”

For Eckhart, this “blindness” was more than simply shutting one’s eyes to creation, it was emptying one’s mind of all images, so that the divine light can shine into that place I have often spoken of: this is so pure and transcendent and lofty that all lights are darkness and nothing compared with this light.

By far Eckhart’s favorite metaphor for the divine spark’s work in the soul was the divine (also eternal) birth. The birth of the Son in the ground of the soul of the believer had been a theme of early Christian teaching, dating

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01 back to the second century CE. Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and es-
 02 pecially Origen all wrote of Jesus being “born again” in the heart of the be-
 03 liever. For Origen, this event was based on acquired knowledge of the Word,
 04 while in the works of Maximus the Confessor the divine birth was the prod-
 05 uct of a virtuous life. Eckhart either knew these teachings directly or via
 06 contemporaries as Albert or Bonaventure. But his own understanding of the
 07 divine birth was distinctive, stressing instead the internal silence and empti-
 08 ness that made it possible.

09 Like the Blessed Virgin herself, the soul of the seeker had to be pure and
 10 uncorrupted. Only the higher power of the divine spark remained unpol-
 11 luted by creaturely thinking, yet even here some unwanted alloys needed to
 12 be stripped clean. *I have often said that the soul cannot be pure unless she is re-*
 13 *duced to her original purity, as God made her, just as gold cannot be made from*
 14 *copper by two or three roastings: it must be reduced to its primary nature.* Like the
 15 alchemist’s elixir, the distilled essence of the divine spark makes possible the
 16 very act of creation, of birth.

17 To be ready to receive God’s most beloved will and to do it continually, Eckhart
 18 clarified, *I would be a virgin, untrammelled by any images, just as I was when I was*
 19 *not. . . Since according to the masters union comes only by the joining of like to like,*
 20 *therefore a man must be a maiden, a virgin, who would receive the virgin Jesus.* As
 21 in his embrace of spiritual poverty, Eckhart distinguishes between external
 22 virginity and chastity—as in the case of those under religious vows—and
 23 internal purity, a complete *letting-go* of all mental attachments.

24 The stillness and darkness of the desert night, the utter emptiness of a
 25 virgin mind, all made a direct encounter with God inevitable. And here,
 26 Eckhart revealed, was the greatest irony of the long quest for God: the ulti-
 27 mate role reversal of seeker and sought. The final step for the human seeker
 28 was in fact pure passivity, a total *letting-go-ness* that Eckhart called *potential*
 29 *receptivity*. The ultimate *breaking through*, he explained, was not made by the
 30 seeker coming to God, but by God coming to the seeker.

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 32 *You need not seek Him here or there, He is no further than the door of your*
 33S *heart; there He stands patiently awaiting whoever is ready to open up and let*

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Him in. No need to call to Him from afar: He can hardly wait for you to open up. He longs for you a thousand times more than you long for Him.

The divine spark provided the gateway but the initiative came from the divine creator Himself.

The seeker who has fully let go of all images and thoughts is irresistible to God. *Whenever a man humbles himself, God is unable to withhold His own goodness; He is obliged to sink Himself, to pour Himself out into that humble man, and to the meanest of all He gives Himself most and gives Himself wholly.* Some of Eckhart's fellow theologians recoiled at the notion of limiting divine freedom in this way, but the master insisted on underscoring the divine compulsion to love:

God's comfort is pure and unmixed: it is perfect and complete, and He is so eager to give it to you that He cannot wait to give you Himself first of all. God is so besotted in His love for us, it is just as if He had forgotten heaven and earth and all His blessedness and all His Godhead and had no business except with me alone, to give me everything for my comforting. And He gives it to me complete, He gives it to me perfectly, He gives it to me most purely, He gives it all the time, and He gives it to all creatures.

Eager to press home his point, Eckhart reaches for some of his characteristic hyperbole.

If anyone were to rob God of loving the soul, he would rob Him of His life and being, or he would kill God, if one may say so; for the self-same love with which God loves the soul is His life, and in that same love the Holy Ghost blossoms forth, and that same love is the Holy Ghost.

The divine birth, after all, was God's chief aim. *He is never content till He begets His Son in us. And the soul, too, is no way content until the Son of God is born in her.* This, Eckhart explained, was the true meaning of the gospel text, "God sent His only-begotten Son into the world." *You should not take this to*

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01 *mean the external world, as when he ate and drank with us, but you should under-*
 02 *stand it of the inner world. In other words, we are an only son whom the Father has*
 03 *been eternally begetting out of the hidden darkness of eternal concealment.*

04 Eckhart's astonishing expansion of the Incarnation of Christ does not
 05 deny the historically unique identity or mission of the Savior but rather
 06 makes a distinction between Jesus's *carnal birth*—about [which] you have been
 07 told plenty—and the *eternal birth* or the *eternal Word . . . spring[ing]* from the *es-*
 08 *sential mind of [God] the Father.* In this latter respect, *God is ever at work in the*
 09 *eternal now, and His work is the begetting of His Son. He is bringing him forth all*
 10 *the time.*

11
 12 *And so, if a man is to know God—and therein consists his eternal bliss—he*
 13 *must be, with Christ, the only Son of the Father. . . . True, you remain clearly*
 14 *distinguished in your carnal birth, but in the eternal birth you must be one,*
 15 *for in God there is no more than the one natural spring.*

16
 17 *And so, he attempted to clarify, if you ask me, since I am an only son whom the*
 18 *heavenly Father has eternally begotten, whether I have eternally been that son in*
 19 *God, my answer is: Yes and no. Yes, a son in that the Father has eternally begotten*
 20 *me, not a son by way of being unborn [i.e., eternal].*

21 Eckhart was treading on dangerous ground here, risking that some of his
 22 listeners might not appreciate his fine distinction between the way that Jesus
 23 was the unique Son of God and the way that the righteous seeker was also
 24 God's son. Still the preacher pursued his point with abandon: *For between*
 25 *your human nature and his there is no difference: it is one, for it is in Christ what is*
 26 *in you. That is why I said in Paris that in the righteous man all things are fulfilled*
 27 *that holy scripture and the prophets ever said of Christ: for, if you are in a right state,*
 28 *then all that was said in the Old and New Testaments will be fulfilled in you.*

29 These were heady words for any simple seeker in the audience. Was
 30 Meister Eckhart actually saying that a experiencing the divine birth in the
 31 soul made one divine? This was far more than any other way to God
 32 promised—but could it actually be true?

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Becoming God

For Eckhart, the eternal birth was the seeker's return to his or her true nature. But what was this true nature and how was it affected by the divine union? The divine birth, the master explains, is a profoundly intimate and intersubjective experience, in which the boundaries between the self and God become blurred. The actors and the act become indistinguishable from one another. The divine birth in the seeker's soul is a mutual event: *the opening and the entering are a single act*. The resulting self-awareness is likewise shared, to the extent that there is but one perspective. *You must know*, Eckhart explains, *that this is in reality one and the same thing—to know God and to be known by God, to see God and to be seen by God*. Or in his more famous—and provocative—formulation: *The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love*.

The state Eckhart described was more than immersion. One should not think of the soul as a piece of wood in a tub of water, he cautioned, for these were *united but not one with one another . . . where there is water there is no wood, and where there is wood no water*. Nor, conversely, was the soul like a vessel in the conventional sense: *Spiritual vessels are different from physical vessels . . . whatever is received in that is in the vessel and the vessel in it, and it is the vessel itself. Whatever the spiritual vessel receives, is its own nature*. The soul in God, Eckhart underscored, is *nothing like God, but instead is of the same essence*. Just as God is everywhere, the transformed soul is everywhere. *Whatever is in God, is God, it cannot drop away from it*.

Thus the seeker does and doesn't *become God* in a conventional or literal sense. It would be more accurate to say that the divinized soul participates in God, while keeping its own distinctive and derivative identity. Human existence, after all, is borrowed from God, who is the face causing the reflection in the mirror. *It is a question difficult to answer*, Eckhart concedes, *how the soul can endure it without perishing when God presses her into Himself*. Yet the distinction between Creator and created does not totally disappear. Eckhart also carefully distinguishes between *the inner man*, who experiences divine

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01 union, and *the outer man*, who continues to live in the world. The inner man,
02 or *bare substantial being*, coexists with God *in the ground*; the outer man, or
03 *personal being*, shares of this substance but remains a worldly creature, reli-
04 ant on divine grace throughout its earthly existence.

05 For Eckhart, divine union was not some optional upgrade; it was the
06 very purpose of human existence. *I have said before and say again that every-*
07 *thing our Lord has ever done he did simply to the end that God might be with us and*
08 *that we might be one with Him, and that is why God became man. It would be of*
09 *little value for me*, he proclaimed elsewhere, that “*the Word was made flesh*” for
10 *man in Christ as a person distinct from me, unless he was also made flesh for me*
11 *personally so that I too might be God’s son*. Yet the idea that such a union could
12 be achieved on earth remained a controversial claim, especially among theo-
13 logians and church leaders. The universal accessibility of such a state posed
14 even more troubling questions about the roles of clergy and sacraments. And
15 what were the consequences for an individual who achieved such union—
16 were they truly “free in the spirit,” as some contemporaries claimed St. Paul
17 had promised? Meister Eckhart’s *wayless way* to God obviously came out of a
18 deep Christian tradition, but where it was headed was less obvious to his
19 audiences, and perhaps even to the master himself.



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{ CHAPTER ELEVEN }

Living Without a Why

The just man has such need of justice that he cannot love anything but justice. If God were not just—as I have said before—he would care nothing for God. . . . If the devil were just, he would love him insofar as he was just, and not a hair's breadth more.

GERMAN SERMON 41

The Seeker Transformed

The divine birth represented for Meister Eckhart what the chivalric romances of his youth would have called his Holy Grail. Like a questing knight, after many years of journeying he had at last discovered the pure and shining prize he sought. This treasure, he realized early on, lay not in the wider world he had shunned at the age of sixteen, nor, he eventually decided, in the daily discipline or good works of a pious friar. Like Parzival and other great seekers, he looked increasingly within himself for answers, gradually letting go of all images and notions of his divine quarry, until the only way left to “know” the God he sought was in a direct encounter. The God Eckhart found was not reached by the intentional suffering and ecstatic visions of mystical nuns or beguines, but by his final letting go of the pursuit itself, whereupon that spark of divinity within broke through and filled his being. The result was a divinized person (*homo divinus*), what Eckhart called the “just” or the “noble” person.

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01 But at what cost this prize? Had the Parisian master unwittingly strayed
 02 into the heretical territory of religionless spirituality, the “auto-theism” of
 03 Marguerite Porete? Worse yet, was he unwittingly leading scores of the
 04 trusting faithful to their own perdition? Whatever his private reflections,
 05 Eckhart the public preacher showed no doubts that *the divine birth* consti-
 06 tuted the fundamental truth of the gospels and of all Christianity. It was his
 07 pastoral duty to share this version of the good news with the world. Yet at
 08 the same time he was no isolated naïf. As a longtime administrator with
 09 some degree of worldly experience, Eckhart knew that he was presenting a
 10 novel and potentially hazardous interpretation of the quest for salvation.
 11 Out of some combination of conviction and self-confidence he regularly
 12 courted danger with his provocative exclamations. Preaching the divine
 13 birth to “the common people” was daring enough, but Eckhart went still
 14 further, attempting to convey his unconventional notions of God and the
 15 Godhead and of an active spirituality based not on the quest for salvation but
 16 on the “why-less” nature of Creation itself. The *just man* transformed by the
 17 divine birth became in that sense not just *like* God but God Himself—a
 18 seemingly heretical notion by any traditional theological standard.

19 Without full knowledge of the master’s taste for hyperbole or of the way
 20 Eckhart qualified his most outrageous statements, his contemporaries might
 21 be forgiven for seeing more than a passing resemblance to the notorious Free
 22 Spirit heresy and its talk of self-divinization and freedom from conventional
 23 morality. Eckhart was aware of this risk and tried to head it off by invoking
 24 his theological hero Augustine, who claimed that *when a man accommodates*
 25 *himself barely to God, with love, he is un-formed, then in-formed and transformed in*
 26 *the divine uniformity wherein he is one with God.* “One with God” was a familiar
 27 and sufficiently vague phrase that kept his sermon safely within the bounds
 28 of orthodoxy, but Eckhart seemed intent on pushing his luck, adding, *when*
 29 *[that man] is one with God he brings forth all creatures with God, bestowing bliss on*
 30 *all creatures by virtue of being one with Him.*

31 What were the moral obligations of an individual who had been thus
 32 transformed by the *divine birth*? Here too the master treads perilously close
 33S to the alleged “spiritual liberty” of Marguerite Porete. *The truly humble man,*
 34N according to Eckhart, *has no need to pray to God for anything.*



This man now dwells in unhampered freedom and pure nakedness, for he needs undertake and take on nothing small or great—for whatever belongs to God belongs to him. . . . This humble man has as much power over God as he has over himself, and all the good that is in all the angels and all the saints is as much his own as it is God's own.

The spiritual perfection resulting from the *divine birth* in the soul, according to Eckhart, was not a rejection of human nature but a fulfillment of its true potential.

Some contemporaries heard in Eckhart's words an endorsement of the Free Spirit heresy, the idea that those who had experienced union with God could never lose divine status and were thus at liberty to live as they chose, eschewing good works and Christian ritual—and even committing sin—without consequence. But once again, Eckhart's penchant for shocking statements made things unnecessarily hard for him. His teachings on the effects of the divine birth were in fact among his most orthodox beliefs. Contrary to adherents of the Free Spirit heresy, the liberty preached by Eckhart did not make Christian virtues superfluous but rather inevitable. *Some people, Eckhart preaches, hope to reach a point where they are free of works, [but] I say this cannot be.* The individual transformed by the divine spark does not *need* to do any good works to reach heaven, but *chooses* to do them because of his or her new divine nature. Nor do sexual promiscuity or other sins suddenly become blameless—quite the opposite.

In very truth I believe, nay, I am sure, that the man who is established in this cannot in any way ever be separated from God. I say he can in no way lapse into mortal sin. He would rather suffer the most shameful death, as the saints have done before him, than commit the least of mortal sins.

As if to anticipate the accusations of future inquisitors, the master explicitly refutes any antinomian interpretation of his words.

Some people say, "If I have God and the love of God, then I can do what I like." They have not grasped this aright. So long as you are capable of doing





01 *anything that is against God and His commandment, you have not the love*
 02 *of God, though you may deceive the world into thinking you have. . . . just*
 03 *like a man whose legs are tied so that he cannot walk, so a man who is in the*
 04 *will of God can do no wrong.*

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Did this mean that transformed seekers became spiritual automatons or puppets? Not so, Eckhart responded, explaining that *the divine birth* allowed seekers to know God and God's will so intimately that they were strongly inclined to do good works and live morally, but they still lived within the world and were subject to its temptations. Still possessed of free will, they had to choose moment by moment to follow the righteous path, and for most, missteps were inevitable. In other words, the inner experience of union with God *is the highest perfection of the spirit to which man can attain spiritually. Yet, this is not the highest perfection that we shall possess forever with body and soul.*

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In Catholic tradition that ultimate experience is limited to those few extraordinary individuals known as saints. Only the saints, Eckhart proclaimed, experienced the divine birth to such a degree that the outer person was transformed as completely as the inner spirit. Only the saints were capable of living a purely holy life. Most just people, and here Eckhart clearly included himself, could but aspire to such perfection in this life.

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It may well be that those who are on the way to the same good but have not yet attained it, can recognize these perfected ones of whom we have spoken, at least in part. Indeed if I knew one such man, I would give a minster [large church] full of gold and precious stones, if I had it, for a single fowl for that man to eat . . . but note, you must pay good heed, for such people are very hard to recognize.

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For those saints, individual identity, what Eckhart calls *personal being*, is preserved but *the outer man* has been completely subsumed by *the inner man*, which shares the same essence as God. For most people who have experienced *the divine birth*, however, *the outer man* continues to live by his own support, albeit benefiting from *the influx of grace from the personal being in many*



manifestations of sweetness, comfort, and inwardness, and that is good; but it is not the best. The *just man* still remains separated from the Godhead by his worldly external nature. Sanctification may not come until much later in life or after death. In other words, for the great majority of spiritual seekers, *the divine birth* marks not the end of the individual's journey to God, but its true beginning.

Living and Loving

What will the rest of that journey look like? Meister Eckhart's long association with the contemplative tradition has frequently obscured his advocacy of the active Christian life. Yet in his preaching, the aftermath of the divine birth is even more significant than all of the preparation that made that experience possible. Take his characterization of the soul, which in both Latin and German is a feminine word (*anima; Seele*). In Eckhart's hands, that seemingly random lexicological fact is transformed into an extended metaphor on the birth of Christ in the soul, which depends on the soul first becoming pure and virgin, like the Blessed Mother herself. In his freewheeling translation of Luke 10:38, he preaches *Our Lord Jesus Christ went up into a citadel and was received by a virgin who was a wife. Now mark this word carefully, he stresses, it must of necessity be a virgin, the person by whom Jesus was received.* (In German this last word, *empfangen*, can also mean "conceived," an intentional pun on Eckhart's part.) "*Virgin*" is as much as to say a person who is void of alien images, as empty as he was when he did not exist. The master is referring, of course, to his central teaching of *letting-go-ness*, whereby the individual's soul becomes "naked" and "empty," ready to receive the Word of God via the divine spark. Only a completely detached and pure soul can experience the divine birth.

The resulting union is ineffably wondrous, Eckhart agrees, but it is far from the end of the seeker's journey.

Now attend, and follow me closely. If a man were to be ever virginal, he would bear no fruit. If he is to be fruitful, he must be a wife. "Wife" is the noblest title one can bestow on the soul—far nobler than "virgin." For a man



01 *to receive God within him is good, and in receiving he is virgin. But for God*
 02 *to be fruitful in him is better, for only the fruitfulness of the gift is the thanks*
 03 *rendered for that gift, and herein the spirit is a wife, whose gratitude is fe-*
 04 *cundity, bearing Jesus again in God's paternal heart.*

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06 *This is my commandment, Eckhart invokes John 15:12, that you love one an-*
 07 *other as I have loved you. Yet Christians should not see love as a duty or as a*
 08 *means to salvation: Properly considered, love is more a reward than a behest.*
 09 *Good works—the master again stresses—are the natural fruits of the divine*
 10 *birth, not its prerequisites. Of course the faithful seeker will attempt to lead*
 11 *a life of love before union, but it is only that direct encounter with the God-*
 12 *head that makes such a life truly possible. Having experienced the depths of*
 13 *God's love, the transformed individual now avidly seeks opportunities to*
 14 *express that love.*

15 *In explaining the proper relationship between the contemplative (inner)*
 16 *life and the active (outer) life, Eckhart turned again to a contrast between*
 17 *two women, this time historical figures from the gospel of Luke (10:38–42;*
 18 *also John 11:1–2):*



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20 *In the course of their journey [Jesus] came to a village, and a woman*
 21 *named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called*
 22 *Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking.*
 23 *Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving said, "Lord, do*
 24 *you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by my-*
 25 *self? Please tell her to help me." But the Lord answered: "Martha,*
 26 *Martha," he said, "you worry and fret about so many things and yet*
 27 *few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better*
 28 *part; it is not to be taken from her."*

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30 *To most fourteenth-century Christians, this translated into a biblical en-*
 31 *dorsement of the monastic life over the distracted life of a layperson. Eckhart*
 32 *himself voiced a version of this reading in his Latin commentary on the gos-*
 33S *pel of John: As long as we are not like God and still undergoing the birth by which*
 34N *Christ is formed in us, like Martha, we are restless and troubled by many things.*



In a later vernacular sermon, however, Eckhart dramatically reversed the traditional exegesis of the passage, claiming that Martha was in fact more deserving of our admiration and imitation. Mary, he argued, embodied the first phase of the spiritual life—*young, innocent, open, full of unspeakable longing*. Martha, by contrast, was *mature and full of wise understanding, which knew how to do outward works perfectly as love ordains*. Her words about Mary were no angry retort, Eckhart explained, but more like teasing. *She saw how Mary was possessed with a longing for her soul's satisfaction. Martha knew Mary better than Mary knew Martha, for she had lived long and well, and life gives the finest understanding.*

As Eckhart had advised his novices back in the Erfurt priory to do, Martha came to know herself first, before she came to know God. She knew the world and its temptations, as well as her own internal struggles. She also knew *the eternal light*, and the compunction to serve others, hence her annoyance with her sister who *sat there a little more for her own happiness than for spiritual profit*. Jesus's response to Martha's plea was not a rebuke but a reassurance *that Mary would become as she desired. . . . She was filled with joy and bliss and had only just entered school, to learn to live*. Martha, on the other hand, *was so well grounded in her essence that her activity was no hindrance to her: work and activity she turned to her eternal profit*. And this, Eckhart reveals, is why the Lord named her twice ("Martha, Martha"): *He meant that every good thing, temporal and eternal, that a creature could possess was fully possessed by Martha.*

For a lay audience accustomed to accepting an inferior spiritual status, Eckhart's words must have come as an unexpected but welcome validation. The cloistered life of chastity, poverty, and obedience had its place in preparing for the divine birth, but ultimately it was a life lived for others that mattered most. The divine path he preached not only didn't denigrate the active life but raised it up as the ultimate goal of all contemplation. Just people went forth and performed good works not to earn God's favor or for any other reason, but because having experienced the divine birth within their souls and attained unity with God, they could not do otherwise. This was the meaning of *living without a why*, a phrase Eckhart did not invent but likely picked up from Beatrice of Nazareth or Marguerite Porete. *In the same way as God acts, so the just [person] acts without why; and just as life lives for its own sake and asks*



01 *for no why for which to live, so the just [person] has no why for which to act. Follow-*
 02 *ing the divine birth, the seeker merely expresses the divine nature that has*
 03 *become his or her own: God and I are one. Through knowledge I take God into*
 04 *myself, through love I enter into God.*

05 The just person—unlike the scholastic—had learned to stop questioning
 06 everything: Why life? Why God? Why me? The just person no longer
 07 thought of the world in instrumentalist terms, doing something in order to
 08 achieve or receive something. Like God, he or she acted without thinking of
 09 justification.

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11 *If someone asked [the just man]: “Why do you love God?” [he would re-*
 12 *spond]—“I don’t know, for God’s sake.”—“Why do you love the truth?”—*
 13 *For truth’s sake.”—“Why do you love righteousness?”—“For righteousness’*
 14 *sake.”—“Why are you living?”—“Indeed, I don’t know! [but] I like living.”*

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16 Love itself has become an irresistible force. The just person no longer has
 17 any attachments whatsoever, but rather loves all of creation equally and in-
 18 *discriminately, in conformance with his or her divine nature. You must love*
 19 *all men equally, respect and regard them equally, and whatever happens to another,*
 20 *whether good or bad, must be the same as if it happened to you. Eckhart realized*
 21 *that such a state of equanimity (gelichkeit) seemed virtually impossible, but*
 22 *for the truly transformed individual it was completely natural. Jesus himself,*
 23 *Eckhart reminded his listeners, preached: “He who leaves father and mother*
 24 *and sister and brother, farm and fields or anything else, shall receive a hundred*
 25 *fold and eternal life” (Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:29–30). The transformed indi-*
 26 *vidual can accept a friend’s death or his own eyes being plucked out with-*
 27 *out resistance or protest. Though it should entail all the pains of hell, of purgatory,*
 28 *and the world, the will in union with God would bear all this eternally, forever in*
 29 *hellish torment, and take it for its eternal bliss. One need only look to the exam-*
 30 *ple of the Savior Himself. When Jesus is led before Pilate, like a lamb led to*
 31 *the slaughter, he does not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:7), despite the governor’s*
 32 *repeated accusations. Like the just man, the mute “King of the Jews” sim-*
 33S *ply knows that he is the Son of God and feels no compunction to assert*
 34N *this truth.*



The person who had experienced the divine birth also came closer to experiencing *the Eternal Now* of God. Freed from the why of cause and consequence, the *just man* no longer lived between “before” and “after,” between past and future. He lived in the instant, or as Eckhart calls it, in *this present now*. This was not an ecstatic flight from the world, as described by many Neoplatonists, but to the contrary a full immersion in the cares and suffering of the world. Since the transformed inner man was still encased in the outer man, this experience was not completely freed from the temporality of the world. But it did permit the just person to appreciate the essential shared being with fellow humans and other creatures, freed from the tyranny of time.

In some ways, the just person’s state of equanimity is reminiscent of Stoic apathy—the complete eradication of all emotions from the inner self, robbing pain and misfortune of their ability to distress us. But Eckhart did not seek to eliminate a powerful emotion such as empathy so much as to universalize it. For the *just man*, love was an overwhelming and unifying force. Certainly the self-knowledge advocated by Stoics had helped prepare him for the divine birth, but it was the divine essence that now filled him that overcame all suffering. The serenity he displayed might look like that of the accomplished Stoic on the surface, but it sprang from the certainty of unity with all fellow humans, not willful separation from them. Eckhart compared the abiding guidance of the divine birth to a nearby lightning strike that we intuitively turn toward.

So it is with all in whom this birth occurs, they are promptly turned toward this birth with all they possess, be it never so earthy. In fact, what used to be a hindrance now helps you most. Your face is so fully turned toward this birth so that, no matter what you see or hear, you can get nothing but this birth from all things.

The bond between the divine essence and active love was so strong because “God is love,” in the words of 1 John (4:8). *God is love because he is totally lovable and total love. God is all the best that can be thought or desired by each and every person—and more so.* The active Christian life that followed the divine

01 birth was not the logical outcome, but rather the inevitable outcome. This
 02 was the good news of the Scriptures, Eckhart proclaimed, and in preaching
 03 a life of joyous action he was merely serving as a guide for others on how to
 04 become *an authentic person*.
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06 Reimagining Salvation

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 09 *Living without a why* is undoubtedly a noble goal, but how attainable was it
 10 for the average seeker? Even more fundamentally, how understandable was
 11 Meister Eckhart's description of it for the ordinary Christian of his day? The
 12 master frequently contradicted himself on this question, suggesting that he
 13 himself remained of two minds about the accessibility of his message (occa-
 14 sionally reassuring listeners *if you can't understand it, don't worry, because I am*
 15 *going to speak of such truth that few good people can understand*). It's possible that
 16 certain sermons were aimed at more advanced members of his audiences,
 17 but his Dominican training would have recoiled at any hint of elitism. More
 18 typically, Eckhart made universally high demands on all his listeners, as-
 19 suming adequate training in basic Christian doctrine, the ability to distin-
 20 guish when the master was employing hyperbole or metaphorical language,
 21 as well as an open heart motivated by genuine and pious intentions. For such
 22 individuals, who also shared his desire for a profound experience of God, all
 23 talk of the divine birth and its aftermath remained safely within the bound-
 24 aries of church orthodoxy.

25 But what about the rest of his audience? Were most people able to under-
 26 stand the master's words, much less carry them out in their own spiritual
 27 journeys? What guidance did the master offer the less spiritually adept? This
 28 was the basis of later criticisms of Eckhart's preaching that he made little
 29 accommodation to "simple and uneducated" listeners, who were prone to
 30 misunderstand many of his ideas. It's possible, of course, that the master
 31 dedicated some of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sermons he delivered
 32 over the course of his long life to the usual topics of sin and repentance,
 33S aimed at the lowest common denominator in his audiences. In that respect,
 34N the collection of some 150 examples that survived might in fact be a

nonrepresentative sample, preserved only because of their treatment of “higher” questions such as divine union. But Eckhart’s provocative discussion of such questions was in fact the basis for his popular reputation as well as his own identity as a teacher. His message may have been obscure at times but he sought to spread it as widely as possible. It was not secret knowledge in the sense of the ancient Gnostics, but his version of “the good news” preached by Jesus.

Eckhart’s confidence in the spiritual capabilities of his audience also helps account for his apparent uninterest in addressing any ethical questions in his sermons. He speaks of “good works” and “love” for the most part as general concepts, only rarely describing them more specifically in terms of “dos” or “don’ts.” Yet this is exactly the type of direction sought by average Christians raised to avoid sin, accumulate merit, and thus get to heaven. Perhaps Eckhart believed that the basics of Christian morality were so universally understood that he need not devote any attention to rearticulating them. And certainly those who experienced the divine birth he described did not require direction on how to love, given that they were filled with the divine essence. His calling, like that of John the Baptist, was to prepare the way of the Lord, to teach his fellow Christians how to experience God. The rest, he apparently believed, would take care of itself.

And yet Eckhart’s preaching had some profound implications for Christianity as understood in his day. Unquestionably the most fundamental shift in the master’s salvation scheme was his reconceptualization of good and bad deeds alike. Like his hero Augustine, Eckhart viewed evil as simply the privation, or absence, of good. As the bishop of Hippo had written against the dualist Manicheans, evil has no substance of its own, any more than does darkness (the absence of light). Eckhart concurred: *Do you want to know what sin is? Turning away from felicity and virtue, that is the origin of all sin.* And in so turning away from God, he preached, the sinner moved outside of the divine field of vision. God cannot know sin or evil any more than the light can know the darkness. *God knows nothing outside of Himself; His eye is always turned inward into Himself. What He sees, He sees entirely within Himself. Therefore God does not see us when we are in sin.* So while *God makes merry and laughs at good deeds . . . all other works which are not done to God’s glory are like ashes in God’s sight.*



01 This was a shocking revelation for fourteenth-century Christians who
02 came of age amid incessant jeremiads and ubiquitous artworks portraying
03 an angry, vengeful God, one who seemed unambivalently obsessed with
04 punishing the multitude of human sins committed against Him. Eckhart's
05 God—pure being, pure love—seeks out only those parts of Himself to be
06 found within His creation, including the *divine spark* in every person. He is
07 not oblivious to human transgressions, but is the very essence of mercy: *God*
08 *always rewards more than he should and punishes less than he should.* Stressing
09 the magnitude of divine forgiveness, Eckhart even declares that *God likes*
10 *forgiving big sins more than small ones. The bigger they are, the more gladly and*
11 *quickly He forgives them.*

12 In a religious culture centered on the overcoming of sin and evil, Eckhart
13 sounded a singularly optimistic note about the human potential for reaching
14 God. But his approach remained essentially metaphysical rather than pasto-
15 ral, focused more on the cosmic big picture than on immediate needs for
16 moral guidance. The objective of most of his fellow Dominican preachers
17 was to provoke in their listeners visceral pangs of overwhelming remorse for
18 personal sins, emotions that would lead to confession, penance, and re-
19 formed lives. Eckhart the Parisian master, by contrast, spoke of evil in a
20 more abstract manner, as a necessary part of human nature but more a mis-
21 taken detour than a vicious rejection of God. Sin, he believed, was simply a
22 perversion of humans' natural inclination toward good: *If a man slays an-*
23 *other, he does so not in order to do evil: he thinks that as long as the other lives, he*
24 *will not be at peace with himself; accordingly he will seek his desire in peace, for*
25 *peace is something we love.* Even original sin could not obscure the divine light
26 that shone in every individual, regardless of character or circumstances. *In*
27 *every work, even in an evil, I repeat, in one evil both according to punishment and*
28 *guilt, God's glory is revealed and shines forth in equal fashion.* Eckhart's discus-
29 sions of sin and evil all share this lofty perspective, relying on scholastic
30 theorems rather than the concrete examples most listeners were accus-
31 tomed to:

32
33S *Should anyone ask what God is, this is what I should now say, that God is*
34N *love, and in fact so loveable that all creatures seek to love His loveableness,*



whether they know it or not, whether they wish to or not. . . . there is no creature so worthless that it could love anything evil.

Obviously Eckhart believed in Satan and hell, but just as obviously his images of both—like his descriptions of God and heaven—were dramatically different from those of other preachers.

The question is asked, what burns in hell. The masters generally say it is self-will. But I declare in truth: nothing burns in hell . . . just because God and all those who stand before His face have on account of their true blessedness something which they who are separated from God have not, this very not torments the souls in hell more than self-will or any fire.

This unquenchable desire to be united with God for all time, Eckhart preached, was a worse punishment than any of the torments that artists or poets could dream up. (Of course he had not read his contemporary Dante's *Inferno*.) So too in life, choosing evil provided its own punishment:

Now you might say, "Bad people have a good time; they get their way more than other people." Solomon says, "The evil man should not say, 'What harm will it do me if I do evil and it does not hurt me?' or 'Who would do anything to me on that account?' The very fact that you do evil is to your great harm and causes you enough pain." . . . And if God were to give [the sinner] all the sorrow in the world, He could not afflict him more harshly than he is afflicted by being a sinner.

Just as sinning was its own punishment, Eckhart preached that performing good works was its own reward. This too was a jarring message for pious listeners who aspired to attain the rewards and avoid the punishments of the afterlife. In some ways, the master's attitude toward good works presaged that of Martin Luther two centuries later. Both believed, for instance, that conventional acts of piety could only indirectly affect the soul's progress toward true union with God. In Eckhart's view, acts of asceticism and detachment might assist in the self-emptying required to make way for the

01 divine birth. For Luther, the seeker's frustrated attempts to achieve salvation
 02 by practicing such works might reveal the radically corrupt nature of all
 03 humans and the absolute necessity of divine help. Similarly, both men be-
 04 lieved that the subsequent transformative moment—what Eckhart calls *the*
 05 *divine birth* and Luther refers to as justification by faith—was made possible
 06 only by divine grace, by God coming to the seeker. Finally, both Luther and
 07 Eckhart saw the good works that follow that moment as the natural out-
 08 pouring of the soul's transformation. But while Luther characterized the
 09 resulting pious life as a form of gratitude (and quickly became wary of talk
 10 about "becoming God"), Eckhart insisted that the truly pious life lacks any
 11 cause, any "why"—even gratitude—and instead flows forth as the inevitable
 12 product of God's divine nature now dwelling within the soul. All good
 13 works, he seems to say, belong to God, since it is the divinity within that
 14 makes them possible, transforming the individual seeker into an active vehi-
 15 cle for God's love.

16 Again, Meister Eckhart does not provide his listeners with much guid-
 17 ance on what genuinely good works based only on divine love might look
 18 like. He does, however, explicitly discourage many so-called good works
 19 intended to help the seeker accumulate merit, namely *fasts, vigils, prayers,*
 20 *and the rest.* If such officially ordained activities aid in *letting-go-ness*, then
 21 they might be valuable, but Eckhart rejects all popular notions of "achiev-
 22 ing" salvation through external acts of piety. Pilgrimages to venerate shrines
 23 and their sacred relics presumably fell into this ambivalent category, as the
 24 master at one point asks, *People, what is it you are seeking in dead bones?* If visit-
 25 ing a shrine helped a seeker get *in the right state*, then it was acceptable; oth-
 26 erwise it risked being idolatrous.

27 This was Eckhart's general rule: any external act that prepared the way
 28 for the divine birth was good; any act that sought something other than God
 29 was bad. Thus the master praised Holy Communion, God's entering into
 30 human beings through the sacrament of the altar, as a prefiguring of the di-
 31 vine birth and castigated those *unworthy [and] unbelieving people who do not*
 32 *believe that this bread on the altar can be transformed, that it can become the gra-*
 33S *cious body of our Lord and that God can bring this about.* Eucharistic devotions
 34N

were becoming increasingly prominent in the fourteenth century, and in this sense Eckhart was perfectly in tune with his times. 01
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Eckhart's position on that other staple of medieval piety, petitionary prayer, was a different matter entirely. Nearly all of Eckhart's contemporaries believed in the efficacy of petitionary prayer, prayer that asks God for something—to heal a sick loved one or safeguard crops or strengthen the petitioner's faith. And nearly all those who uttered such prayers believed that enlisting the help of a heavenly intermediary—be it an esteemed saint, the Blessed Virgin, or Christ Himself—increased the likelihood that God would hear and grant their requests. Eckhart, by contrast, saw no need for intermediaries but held that the divine spark within each human, eager to be reunited with its Creator, put every soul in direct contact with God. This divine union, moreover, was the only acceptable objective of any prayer; all others were not only petty and selfish but ultimately pointless, since everything that happens is part of God's plan. 03
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On the Edge of Orthodoxy 17

The Christianity of fourteenth-century Europe was built on fostering a clear understanding of what constituted sins and what constituted good works. Meister Eckhart sincerely believed his preaching to be orthodox, yet his apparent disregard for external acts of piety understandably confused, frustrated, and even angered some listeners. If preparing for the divine birth was the only legitimate work of a devout seeker, then many conventional forms of devotion—such as going to mass or practicing various penitential acts—seemingly became pointless or even dangerous, as they might contribute to a false sense of spiritual progress. More troubling still, the rewards Eckhart promised were far greater than those proclaimed by most preachers. Not only heaven, the master seemed to imply, but divinity itself lay within the grasp of any genuine believer, no matter how lowly or simple. It's inconceivable that a man of Eckhart's intelligence and experience could not have expected significant resistance, from laypeople and clerics alike. 18
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01 And indeed, his apparent rejection of petitionary prayer and aversion to
 02 many external acts of devotion would eventually cause Eckhart difficulties.
 03 Far more controversial, though, were his teachings about “becoming God.”
 04 In large part, as usual, these problems were of his own making. To the
 05 trained theologian, it was obvious that all beings were at their core divine,
 06 since most scholars agreed with him that God was equivalent not only to
 07 love but to existence itself. As he attempted to explain to a no doubt flum-
 08 moxed, non-scholarly audience, *God knows nothing but being, He is conscious of*
 09 *nothing but being; being is His circumference. God loves nothing but His being. He*
 10 *thinks of nothing but His being.* This was merely a circumlocutory way of say-
 11 ing that all existence was from God and thus all creatures shared in His di-
 12 vinity, a not unorthodox view. Yet the master could not refrain from
 13 incautiously adding, *I say all creatures are one being*—a statement that, when
 14 he was later confronted with accusations of pantheism, Eckhart admitted
 15 *sounds bad and is wrong in this sense.*

16 Still, he argued, both being and love—aka God—were undeniably uni-
 17 versal, shared by all creatures. *Feeling I have in common with beasts and life even*
 18 *with trees. Being is still more innate in me, and that I share with all creatures. . . .*
 19 *Love is noble because it is universal.* This is what Eckhart means when he says
 20 that *whatever is in God, is God*, even animals and stones. All things have the
 21 same origin, what he calls the same primal outflowing (MHG *ursprunc*;
 22 Latin *ebullitio*): *God gives to all things equally, and as they flow forth from God they*
 23 *are equal: angels, men, and all creatures proceed alike from God in their first*
 24 *emanation. . . . Now all things are equal in God and are God Himself.*

25 Again, Eckhart’s position is not pantheist (all things are God), but panen-
 26 theist (God is in all things)—not necessarily a heretical view. And *seeing that*
 27 *God transforms such base things into Himself*, he asks, *what do you think he does*
 28 *with the soul, which He has dignified with His own image?* For while all creatures
 29 share in existence through God, only humans (and angels) have the capacity
 30 to share in God’s essence through thought. This transformation was the
 31 very fulfillment of human existence. *Why did God become man?*, he asks rhe-
 32 torically, answering: *That I might be born God Himself.* The incarnation was *the*
 33S *greatest good God ever did for man*, allowing humans to know God’s being and
 34N love directly and thereby become God: *St. Augustine says, what a man loves,*





that he becomes in love. Should we now say that if a man loves God he becomes God? That sounds as if it were contrary to faith . . . but so it is true in the eternal truth, and our Lord Jesus Christ possesses it. 01
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Eckhart insisted that these and his other statements on God as being stayed well within the limits of orthodoxy, even if they weren't always comprehensible to average listeners. He could not make the same claim, however, for his teachings on *the ground* or *the Godhead*. This novel doctrine went beyond the bounds of Catholic doctrine and into the realm of controversy, possibly even heresy. *The ground*, as Eckhart conceived of it, was beyond even God. It was the primordial place of origin, the state of ultimate nonexistence, from which God—and by extension all human souls—sprang into being. The divine birth, for all its importance, was merely a preliminary step toward the soul's ultimate goal: to return to the *Godhead* or *ground*, a process Eckhart called *breaking through*. 04
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In fact I will say still more, which sounds even stranger: I declare in all truth, by the eternal and everlasting truth, that [the divine spark] is not content with the simple changeless divine being which neither gives nor takes: rather it seeks to know whence this being comes, it wants to get into its simple ground, into the silent desert into which no distinction ever peeped, of Father, Son, or Holy Ghost . . . for this ground is an impartible stillness, motionless in itself. 16
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In this sense, both soul and Creator share the same ultimate purpose—to return to their origin in the Godhead, to *unbecome*. They meet and unite in that *strange and desert place [which] is rather nameless than possessed of a name, and is more unknown than it is known*. This is the *mysterious and secret ground* of existence, deep within the nature of both God and the human soul. 24
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In Neoplatonic terms, *the ground* was the place of origin to which the enlightened soul must inevitably return, *the hidden darkness of the eternal Godhead*. It is this belief in a common origin and point of destination—the *ground*—that leads Eckhart to make some of his most startling assertions. *A great master says that his breaking-through is nobler than his emanation (or creation) and this is true*, the master confirmed from his own experience. As a 29
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01 creature, Eckhart preached, even after experiencing the divine birth, he
02 could merely declare “there is a God,”

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*. . . but in my breaking-through, where I stand free of my own will, of God’s
will, of all His works, and of God himself, then I am above all creatures and
am neither God nor creature, but am that which I was and shall remain for
evermore. . . . Then I am what I was, then I neither wax nor wane, for then
I am an unmoved cause that moves all things.*

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These were bold—and to some listeners potentially heretical—words. At
the moment of *break-through*, both the individual soul and its Creator are
stripped naked of all their distinctions and properties, down to the ground of
being they share. The soul is *transported* (literally “translated”) *into the naked
being of God*. Notions of “self” and “God” seem to melt away as God Himself
is *uncreated*. To aim for total self-annihilation, in the manner of Plato’s *heno-
sis*, was indisputably heretical in the eyes of the Church. Eckhart studiously
avoided talking about the process of *breaking-through* in such terms, but his
un-creation of both soul and God treads perilously close. Even more daringly,
Eckhart also seems to imply that man himself is the origin of God:

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*In my birth all things were born, and I was the cause of myself and all things:
and if I had so willed it, I would not have been, and all things would not have
been. If I were not, God would not be either. I am the cause of God’s being
God: if I were not, then God would not be God.*

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This is as far as the master will go in this seemingly heterodox direction.
Aware that his words might be so construed, he quickly adds *but you do not
need to know this*, and he concludes the same sermon with a reassurance: *If
anyone cannot understand this sermon, he need not worry. For so long as a man is
not equal to this truth, he cannot understand my words*. Yet Eckhart himself
clearly believed this *naked truth which has come direct from the heart of God*. The
concept of *the ground* or *the Godhead*—with its apparently heretical
implications—lay at the heart of all his other teachings. And it was here,
beneath the surface of his supposedly traditional theology, that subsequent



inquisitors would rightly detect a direct challenge to several fundamental Catholic teachings. Eckhart would have denied this, of course, but the radicalism of his approach to spirituality went far beyond occasional references to *the ground*. If the path to divine union was essentially a private, internal one, what need was there for religion itself? Again, if the master considered such a dangerous query, he never expressed it explicitly. But some of his listeners clearly did. Formulating a credible answer to this legitimate question would dominate what remained of Meister Eckhart's life as well as his legacy to this day.

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Epilogue

In whatever way you find God most, and you are most often aware of Him, that is the way you should follow. But if another way presents itself, quite contrary to the first, and if, having abandoned the first way, you find God as much in the new way as in the one that you have left, then that is right. But the noblest and best thing would be this, if a man were come to such equality, with such calm and certainty that he could find God and enjoy Him in any way and in all things, without having to wait for anything or chase after anything: that would delight me! For this, and to this end all works are done, and every work helps toward this. If anything does not help toward this, you should let it go.

THE MASTER'S LAST WORDS

The story of Meister Eckhart's life and legacy leads us to question certain basic assumptions about his impact. Was he, for instance, ever really that dangerous? Remember that in his own day, Eckhart's number of listeners, let alone avid followers, remained small, perhaps a few thousand at most. While many Christians shared his goal of a more spiritually authentic life, only those relative few who regularly heard him preach in the churches of the Rhineland could have fathomed his "highly subtle" philosophy and attempted to put it into practice. Because Eckhart lived more than a century before the advent of the printing press, copies of the master's sermons and writings—all painstakingly written by hand—appear to have circulated only among a small number of admirers in monasteries and convents. He repeatedly rejected radical interpretations of "spiritual liberty" and was

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01 never once accused of openly challenging the clerical hierarchy of the church
02 or denigrating its sacraments. When, toward the end of his life, Eckhart be-
03 came caught up in the beguine and Free Spirit maelstrom, he was never
04 considered a heretical leader or abettor. Rather, he fell victim to a conver-
05 gence of toxic circumstances, where the desperate accusations of two rene-
06 gade friars caught the interest of a zealous archbishop, who happened to
07 enjoy the backing of his political ally, the pope. Even after Meister Eckhart's
08 death and the papal condemnation of the twenty-eight articles, the Friends
09 of God and other disciples continued their discussions of his teachings with-
10 out threat of persecution. The only genuine danger Meister Eckhart seemed
11 to pose during his time was to his own reputation—which eventually recov-
12 ered in the modern era.

13 In some ways, given our advanced means of communication, he poses a
14 greater threat today. Many twenty-first-century people would consider any
15 “mystic” dangerous, or at least seriously misguided. As William James al-
16 ready observed a century ago, “the words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystical’ are of-
17 ten used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard
18 as vague and vast and sentimental and without a base in either facts or logic.”
19 One of the reasons Kurt Flasch and other modern philosophers have waged
20 a sustained campaign to “de-mysticize” Meister Eckhart is that they worry
21 no one other than “spiritual fringe groups” will take him seriously unless
22 this modern stigma is removed. Or—worse yet—that the master will be ap-
23 propriated by such groups and his words used to support their dubious agen-
24 das. In the rationalist paradigm that currently dominates Western thought,
25 there is no reality beyond that which can be measured “objectively.” In the
26 eyes of many contemporary educated people, bestowing credibility on a
27 so-called medieval mystic would be a dangerous intellectual step backward.

28 Yet despite modern suspicion of “mysticism” (a term Eckhart himself
29 never used), the great majority of the world’s population recognizes the es-
30 sential ambiguity and uncertainty—the mystery—of human existence.
31 Whether religiously oriented or not, many people remain open to the possi-
32 bility that some combination of reason and intuition might provide direct
33S access to “something more” than what we can experience with our five
34N senses, imagine with our limited reason, and describe with our language.



This is the possibility that Meister Eckhart speaks to in his teachings. This is one of the reasons he has become so popular in the modern era, where totalizing ideologies of all stripes have become increasingly suspect. 01
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There are other reasons as well, most of them not that different from the reasons Eckhart's contemporaries found him compelling. He presents the way to spiritual fulfillment as a common journey accessible by many paths. He offers a direct, unmediated experience with the oneness of existence, accessible to anyone with sincere intentions. His profoundly egalitarian approach does not privilege anyone by outward religious or social status and does not require any special powers. Above all, Meister Eckhart's path to the God within, as we have seen, is compatible with virtually every major religious tradition and many secular philosophies as well. 04
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This nearly universal religious compatibility, however, potentially makes Eckhart dangerous in another way, particularly to members of certain Christian faith communities. If, as Eckhart seems to suggest, this personal transformation is all that really matters in life and it can be pursued individually, what is the need for the doctrines, rituals, and communal experiences of a particular religion or denomination? Especially for some members of evangelical churches, the universalist (and panentheist) nature of the master's preaching—his apparent embrace of "religionless spirituality"—can work against him. So-called hard exclusivists vehemently resist the inroads of "soft" perennialism and religious pluralism embodied in the New Age enthusiasm for many of Eckhart's controversial statements. In these believers' eyes, there is no further interpretation required for the salvation specifically preached by Jesus and the apostles in the Bible. 13
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Other more ecumenically minded Christians welcome the teachings of Eckhart. Franciscan Richard Rohr, for example, believes that his own wisdom tradition (in this case Roman Catholicism) is deep and strong enough to withstand the doctrinal challenges of Eckhart's approach. Some admirers, such as the former Dominican Matthew Fox, go still further, veering into perennialist territory while supposedly staying anchored in a religious tradition. In Fox's *Creation Spirituality*, Eckhart is a "Mystic-Warrior" who "touches the depths of Western culture's wisdom, which connects to the depths of Eastern wisdom." 26
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providing a useful complement to our inadequate rational understanding. 01
 As the author Marilynne Robinson has pointed out, “We know only what we 02
 know in the ways that we know it or can know it. It is only reasonable to 03
 assume that the physical world is accessible to other modes of perception 04
 than we are capable of.” Eckhart believed, on the basis of his own experi- 05
 ence, that in fact humans possess another way of knowing God or reality, an 06
 internal recognition, which church tradition calls mystical but might just as 07
 aptly be called intuitive. The *divine spark* within each person, the master 08
 teaches, is what links us to one another and to all creation, and intuitive 09
 awareness of that unity is accessible to anyone through his contemplative 10
 process of *letting-go* of all desires and images. Whereas science relies on rep- 11
 resenting the multiplicity of things in language, intuition allows a person to 12
 “know” the unity of things through direct experience. 13

In that respect, Meister Eckhart presents a holistic vision of existence— 14
 not a skewed (and unsustainable) division of phenomena into “natural” and 15
 “supernatural.” It’s all natural, he teaches, just not all understandable in the 16
 same way or to the same degree. At the university, Eckhart attempted to 17
 construct a philosophical bridge between the transcendent Plato and the 18
 empiricist Aristotle, but he found few takers. Obviously today’s self-described 19
 new atheists and other radical materialists would also reject his model of the 20
 universe, yet for many modern people Eckhart’s approach to the vast un- 21
 known is at least plausible. At the very least, it offers an alternative perspec- 22
 tive to many religious people who remain captive to the Enlightenment’s 23
 natural/supernatural dichotomy, in which God and spirituality have been 24
 assigned to an ever-shrinking role in our understanding of existence. 25

Eckhart’s combination of rational and intuitive ways of knowing God or 26
 reality is not a unique approach, although few have portrayed the resulting 27
 “divine birth” in such evocative terms. In fact, if we remove the label “mys- 28
 ticism,” many of the modern world’s greatest philosophers and scientists 29
 have embraced it. Immanuel Kant argued that “thoughts without intuition 30
 are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.” In pondering the uni- 31
 verse, Albert Einstein urged young researchers to resist the “god of intellect” 32
 for “intuition and feeling,” arguing that “there is no true science which does 33
 not emanate from the mysterious.” Some contemporary brain scientists N34



01 have even identified “two fundamentally opposed realities, two different
02 modes of experience” residing respectively in the brain’s two hemispheres.
03 While conceding that some “rationalist” and “intuitive” processes occur in
04 both halves, psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere
05 “tends to deal more with pieces of information in isolation, and the right
06 hemisphere with the entity as a whole, the so-called *Gestalt*.” McGilchrist in
07 fact attributes Western culture’s prevailing materialism to a historical imbalance
08 of left brain dominance over the right brain—the primary source of
09 wonder, interconnectedness, and compassion.

10 Eckhart’s third valuable insight for current spiritual seekers of all varieties
11 involves the consequences of what he calls human divinization. In essence,
12 Eckhart cracked the active/contemplative conundrum of Christianity
13 for laypeople long before Protestant or other modern attempts. Going deep
14 within oneself and reaching out to the world in service were two sides of the
15 same coin for him, not an either/or choice. Without a profound appreciation
16 of what he called the divine unity of existence, good works easily lend themselves
17 to a transactional, commercial way of thinking about salvation. Without
18 participation in the world, the supposedly enlightened person risks
19 slipping into solipsistic selfishness—a state Eckhart compares to a tree that
20 never bears fruit. The just person who has truly experienced *the divine birth*,
21 the direct intuitive encounter with the unity of existence, does not withdraw
22 from society, free from any obligation toward other human beings. Instead,
23 experiencing God means becoming one with God and thus acting as God
24 does—by which Eckhart means living an active life of love and service *without a why*,
25 or any thought of justification or compensation. Acts of personal
26 kindness or contributions to social justice are not means to spiritual enlightenment
27 or salvation but natural effects of the inward experience preached by
28 Meister Eckhart (and many other religious figures). Again, the master describes
29 a holistic approach to the good life, where the perceived divisions
30 between the self and the world, between the individual person and others,
31 dissolve.

32 This is an important distinction for non-Christian or nonreligious admirers
33S of the master who wish to follow his model of contemplation and personal
34N enlightenment for purposes of self-fulfillment. New Age adherents



and other perennialists in particular who desire to learn from Eckhart must acknowledge his grounding in basic Christian principles of neighborly love and mutual obligation. He does not preach a quietist message of self-improvement and escapism, but one of joyful immersion in the needs and suffering of other people, all of whom are created in the image of God (*imago dei*). In this respect, the doctrinal traditions and congregational nature of organized religion offer a useful counterbalance to the potentially individualistic nature of *the divine birth*.

Neglecting such core aspects of Eckhart's message would indeed constitute the act of "hermeneutical violence" that philosopher Kurt Flasch condemns in his screed about the master's appropriation by "the mysticism industry." But Flasch is wrong when he criticizes all attempts by contemporaries—religious or not—to make Eckhart "useful" in their own pursuit of God. The master himself did not live in a religiously pluralistic society in the modern sense, but he was no stranger to spiritual diversity. Just as his own definition of "catholic" wisdom included many non-Christian sources, his approach to divine union consistently recognized individual differences in spiritual experience.

Meister Eckhart's *wayless way* deliberately remained general and nonprescriptive, allowing for countless subjective variations. It would be ahistorical and presumptuous to predict his opinion of either religious exclusivism or perennialism. But based on his long life of service, we can conclude with conviction that nothing would have pleased the master more than to be considered still useful in his fellow seekers' journey to the God within.

Acknowledgments

I came to this project as an interloper from the sixteenth century, the period of European history most familiar to me. It would have been impossible to even conceive of this book without the pioneering work of the last two generations of Eckhart scholars. This debt is acknowledged in the endnotes, but I would like to underscore the pivotal contributions of several individuals, particularly Caroline Walker Bynum, Oliver Davies, Kurt Flasch, Alois Haas, Jeremiah Hackett, Niklaus Largier, Alain de Libera, Dietmar Mieth, Kurt Ruh, Reiner Schürmann, Walter Senner, Loris Sturlese, Frank Tobin, Winfried Trusen, and Richard Wood. As I mentioned in the prologue, I also benefited from the meticulously produced editions of Eckhart's German and Latin works, as well as the English translation of most of Eckhart's German sermons by the late Maurice O'C. Walshe. I'm very grateful to Crossroad Publishing and its editor, Chris Myers, for permission to make such extensive use of quotations from this last work. Finally, the acclaimed Eckhart scholar whose work has most guided my own presentation, Bernard McGinn, graciously agreed to read my penultimate draft, making several invaluable suggestions and saving me from many embarrassing errors. I take full responsibility for any remaining misrepresentations and remain deeply indebted to Professor McGinn for his generosity of spirit on a subject he knows so thoroughly. My sincere hope all along has been that the advantages I bring as an outsider to the topic have outweighed the inevitable shortcomings.

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12 kept things running smoothly and helped me personally in too many ways
13 to count (although I would like to single out Heidi Welch’s assistance with
14 some of the illustrations). Many Vanderbilt colleagues in other departments
15 have made helpful suggestions for the book over the last four years, particu-
16 larly Dan Sharfstein, Paul Stobb, Holly Tucker, and Lenn Goodman (who
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18 Caferro, Volker Leppin, Tom McGinn, Lyndal Roper, and Francesca Trivel-
19 lato. Once again, Jim Toplon and his Interlibrary Loan colleagues have
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22 ing of my team of trial readers who kindly reviewed the entire manuscript,
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26 accessible (and hopefully engaging) prose would have been much harder
27 without these friends’ many thoughtful suggestions. The congregation of
28 Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville likewise provided me with a forum
29 for exploring Eckhart’s teachings among interested nonspecialists.

30 My ever astute and supportive literary agent Rafe Sagalyn had confi-
31 dence in this project from early on and succeeded in finding the ideal pub-
32 lisher for the book. Ginny Smith Younce, my editor at Penguin Press, has
33S likewise been a consistently enthusiastic supporter. She has helped me pare
34N down the text considerably and otherwise provided me with many insight-



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As always, my family has kept me happily anchored in reality and provided much joy. My father, Jack Harrington, passed away during the course of the book's composition but up until his final two weeks continued to discuss the project with me and offer encouragement. I continue to rely on the generosity and kindness of my mother, Marilyn Harrington, as well as that of the Filloons of Lebanon, the Harringtons of Tampa, and the Monins of Jonesborough and Tulsa. My children, George and Charlotte, are on the verge of beginning their adult lives, and I am daily grateful for my remaining time with them. Above all, my greatest debt—and I apologize for the cliché—is to my wife Beth Monin Harrington. Beth read every part of the book, some parts more than once, and gently reshaped (or cut) my “least effective” sentences or passages. The final product is immeasurably better because of her wise and generous contributions, and my life is immeasurably richer for having her as my partner.

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Recommended Reading

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Writings by Eckhart

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For those readers willing and able to consult the original versions of Eckhart's writings, there are two meticulously edited collections of primary sources that have been published since 1936. All widely accepted Latin works

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are contained in *Meister Eckhart, Die lateinischen Werke*, ed. Ernst Benz et al., vols. I–V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936–2007). All authenticated writings in

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Middle High German have been assembled in *Meister Eckhart, Die deutschen Werke*, ed. Josef Quint and Georg Steer, vols. I–V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936–2007). There are many translated selections of the Latin and German

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writings available in English. The most complete and accessible English collection of Eckhart's German sermons and other vernacular writings is *The*

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Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart, trans. Maurice O'C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009). Eckhart's commentaries on Genesis and John, as

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well as documents from the investigation of his orthodoxy, are excerpted in

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Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense,

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trans. and ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981). Excerpts from various Latin commentaries and sermons are

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found in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986). Surviving samples of Meister Eckhart's disputations are presented in *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. Armand A.

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Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974).

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Books About Eckhart

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The bibliography on Eckhart is vast, and grows significantly every year. The most up-to-date and comprehensive scholarly overview on Eckhart is A

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01 *Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
 02 My favorite biographical approach to Eckhart, albeit with some lapses, is
 03 Kurt Ruh, *Meister Eckhart: Theologie¹⁾—Prediger—Mystiker* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989), unfortunately not yet available in English translation. Oliver
 04 Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991) provides
 05 less social and cultural context but is quite good on Eckhart's influences and
 06 main teachings. The recently translated Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Philo-*
 07 *sopher of Christianity*, trans. Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides (New Haven,
 08 CT: Yale University Press, 2015), has much interesting material, although
 09 Flasch's long-standing attempts to "de-mysticize" Eckhart can be distract-
 10 ing. For a broader view of Eckhart within the religious thinking of his
 11 own time, there is no better guide than Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of*
 12 *Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, vol. IV of *The Presence of God: A History of*
 13 *Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 2005). The German Meister-
 14 Eckhart-Gesellschaft maintains an annually updated bibliography of works
 15 published about Eckhart at [www.meister-eckhart-gesellschaft.de/bibliogra-](http://www.meister-eckhart-gesellschaft.de/bibliographie.htm)
 16 [phie.htm](http://www.meister-eckhart-gesellschaft.de/bibliographie.htm). Readers may also wish to view the recommended reading at
 17 the Eckhart Society based in England: www.eckhartociety.org/resources
 18 [/resources](http://www.eckhartociety.org/resources).

Theologie



Books About Eckhart's Times

23 There are many surveys of medieval Europe available. One outstanding re-
 24 cent work is Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univer-
 25 sity Press, 2016). Other commendable overviews include: Johannes Fried,
 26 *The Middle Ages*, trans. Peter Lewis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Har-
 27 vard University Press, 2015); Barbara Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle*
 28 *Ages*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and Robert Bart-
 29 lett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–*
 30 *1350*, reprint ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). For a
 31 reliable overview of Eckhart's Germany, see F. R. H. Du Boulay, *Germany in*
 32 *the Later Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983). A richer (and longer)
 33S account of the German nobility is found in Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Cul-*
 34N *ture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap



- (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The most engaging account of everyday life in Eckhart's day, albeit in England, is Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Touchstone, 2011). 01
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- My favorite introduction to late medieval Christianity is R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995). I also like the classic Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), as well as the recent Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). There is no more comprehensive or enjoyable survey of medieval saints than Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). Two scholarly works are essential for a reader interested in the first century of Dominican life: William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*, 2 vols. (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966 and 1973), and M. Michèle Mulchahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study": *Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998). For a broad introduction to religious dissent, see Malcolm D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1992). For a stimulating and more polemical take on the background of the attempts to enforce orthodoxy, see R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (London: Wiley & Blackwell, 2007). Edwin Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon: A Century in Exile* (New York: Blue Bridge, 2007) offers a highly readable, non-scholarly approach to the subject, while Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (New York: Norton, 1968) provides an older, but still insightful overview of the institution itself during this crucial period. 05
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- A good, brief introduction to scholastic culture is Jacques Verger, *Men of Learning in Europe at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Lisa Neal and Steven Rendall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1997). I have benefited greatly from the careful and clear overview of Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers: An Introduction* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014). For a broader survey, see also *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*: 29
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01 1100–1600, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Uni-
 02 versity Press, 1982; reprint 1988).

03 The best overview of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century female mysti-
 04 cism is Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the*
 05 *New Mysticism—1200–1350*, vol. III of *The Presence of God: A History of Western*
 06 *Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). The pioneering work in
 07 this area is Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*,
 08 trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press,
 09 1995). The scholarship of Caroline Walker Bynum on late medieval religious
 10 women has been path breaking; see especially *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the*
 11 *Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press,
 12 1984) and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval*
 13 *Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987). Readers interested in late
 14 medieval women mystics will wish to consult Amy M. Hollywood, *The Soul*
 15 *as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*
 16 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), as well as her more
 17 recent collection of essays on the subject, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays:*
 18 *Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion (Gender, Theory, and Religion)* (New
 19 York: Columbia University Press, 2016). For the key primary sources dis-
 20 cussed, see *Mechthild of Magdeburg: The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans.
 21 Frank Tobin (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997); *Marguerite Porete: The Mirror*
 22 *of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen Babinsky (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993). A
 23 broader sampling can be found in *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*, ed.
 24 Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin, 2002).

25 Paulist Press has published very fluid translations of important works by
 26 Heinrich Suso (1989) and Johannes Tauler (1985). For a broader historical
 27 range of selections, see the impressive collection *The Essential Writings of*
 28 *Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006),
 29 as well as William Franke's scholarly anthology, *On What Cannot Be Said:*
 30 *Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, 2 vols. (No-
 31 tre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

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Notes

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ABBREVIATIONS

- DW: *Meister Eckhart, Die deutschen Werke*, ed. J. Quint and G. Steer, vols. I–V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936–2007).
- ESSENTIAL ME: *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. and ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).
- HACKETT: *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- HARVEST: Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, vol. IV of *The Presence of God: A History of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005).
- LW: *Meister Eckhart, Die lateinischen Werke*, ed. E. Benz et al., vols. I–V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936–2007).
- ME: Meister Eckhart
- PR: *Predigt* (German Sermon), based on enumeration of DW.
- T&P: *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).
- W: *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O’C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

EPIGRAPH

- 000 There are those who seek: *Sermones in Cantica XXXVI*, in Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (1841–55), 183, col. 968–69.

PROLOGUE

- 000 The contrast between the setting: While Meister Eckhart likely preached at least once at the cathedral during his ten years in Strasbourg, there is no record of the event. The sermon in question (Pr 101) dates from this period.
- 000 The biblical text that served: As was his wont, Eckhart takes some liberties with the verse, translating it as “When all things lay in the midst of silence, then there descended down *into me* from on high, from the royal throne, a *secret word*.” (Interpolations italicized).
- 000 *The more completely you are able*: Pr 101 (W 33).
- 000 *The Son of the heavenly Father*: Pr 101 (W 36–37).
- 000 “In essence,” writes Tolle: Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: Namaste, 1999), 9.
- 000 Many modern Christian authors: <https://cac.org/meister-eckhart-part-i-2015-07-15>.
- 000 He saw himself first as: On the question of Eckhart as a mystic, see the summary in Karl Albert, “Epilogue: Meister Eckhart—Between Mysticism and Philosophy,” in *Hackett*, 599–790. Kurt Flasch has been the most outspoken and persistent advocate of dropping the mystical designation of Eckhart altogether and just calling him a philosopher. See Recommended Reading, 000. 328
- 000 Before we attempt to adapt: I fully agree with Bernard McGinn on the importance, as well as difficulty, in fully historicizing Eckhart’s teachings. See especially *The Mystical Thought of ME* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 20–34.
- 000 “The eye with which”: Pr 12 (W 298).
- 000 To answer that question: I adopt this phrase from Markus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

CHAPTER 1: THE NOBLE HEART

- 000 Some people are half raised up: Pr 25 (W 200).
- 000 "There is nothing on this earth": Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity*, trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), art. 4.
- 000 As Eckhart's exact contemporary: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, ^{Purgatorio} ~~Paradiso~~, Canto 33, ~~edition~~.
- 000 Knight Wirnt von Grafenberg: Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 15.
- 000 "Formerly, the world was so beautiful": Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages*, trans. Peter Lewis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2015), 242.
- 000 Just within his own century: Alfred Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany, 1056–1273* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29, 296; Joachim Leuschner, *Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (North-Holland Publishing, 1980), 3; Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.
- 000 Cologne, where Eckhart would end: Leuschner, *Germany*, 5; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 23.
- 000 "We are in desperate need": Fried, *Middle Ages*, 237.
- 000 In some German lands, feudal dues: Peter Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 242.
- 000 "All over the world": *The Book of Good Love*, cited in Norman Cantor, ed., *Medieval Reader* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 269.
- 000 The first written mention: Erika Albrecht, "Zur Herkunft Meister Eckharts," in *Amsblatt der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche Thüringen*, no. 31 (1978), 28–34. The most up-to-date and succinct summary of Eckhart's biographical information is Walter Senner, "Meister Eckhart's Life, Training, Career, and Trial," in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Hackett, 7–81. For a range of theories on Eckhart's origins, see 8–10.
- 000 By this time, there were perhaps: F. R. H. DuBoulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (Athlone Press, 1988), 65–69.
- 000 By law it could not: Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 107ff.
- 000 Some of the new nobles: *Ibid.*, 33–35.
- 000 Around 1260, the knight's wife: The latest possible birth year is 1262. Sermon of August 28, 1303 (LW V:158) refers to hometown as Hochheim. Walter Senner, "Meister Eckhart's Life," in Hackett, 9.
- 000 Five years later, another document: Johann Georg August Galletti, *Geschichte und Beschreibung des Herzogthums Gotha* (Gotha, 1780), III:263ff.; Albrecht, "Zur Herkunft," 30.
- 000 *Why do I love my father*: Pr 74 (W 376).
- 000 *His bodily father*, in other words: Pr 6 (W 331); Pr 28 (W 131).
- 000 When the knight Eckehard hosted: Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 222ff.
- 000 By the thirteenth century, the German: Brady, *German Histories*, 16.
- 000 In Eckhart's own Thuringia: Steffen Raßloff, *Geschichte Thüringens* (Munich: 2010), 27.
- 000 Most of the material troubadours performed: Olive Sayce, *The Medieval German Lyric, 1150–1300: The Development of Its Themes and Forms in Their European Context* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1978), 265.
- 000 "To love wisely": Albrecht Classen, "Courtly Love Lyric," in Gentry, *Companion*, 118; Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 101.
- 000 Many "dawn songs": Sayce, *The Medieval German Lyric*, 12ff.
- 000 Eckhart's contemporary, poet Hugo von Trimberg,: Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 513–14; Witte Jackson, "Arthurian Material and German Society in the Middle Ages," in W. H. Jackson and Silvia Ranawake, *The Arthur of the Germans: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (University of Wales Press, 2000), 281–84.
- 000 "The way I see it": Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 321.
- 000 The order had established: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutschordensballei_Th%C3%BCrtingen.
- 000 Knowledge, he preaches: Pr 3 (W 165–66).
- 000 Most strikingly, the adult Dominican friar: On noble language, see Hermann Kunisch, "Offenbarung und Gehorsam: Versuch über Eckharts Religiöse Persönlichkeit," in *ME der Prediger. Festschrift zum Eckhart-Gedenkjahr*, ed. Udo Maria Nix, Raphaël Louis Öchsli (Herder, 1960), 122–40.
- 000 Individual human beings: Pr 25 (W 93).
- 000 *must leave the crowd*: Pr 4 (W 55).
- 000 *I extol detachment above*: *On Detachment* (W 566–67).

translated in
Stephen Mitchell,
*The Enlightened
Heart: An
Anthology of
Sacred Poet
(New York: Harper
Perennial), 68.*

- 000 "There was a nobleman": Pr 15 (W 270–74); also *The Nobleman* (W 557–65). 01
- 000 *How could a man: Nobleman?*, 563. 02
- 000 Later in life, in his mid-fifties: *Book of Divine Consolation*, 552–53. 03

CHAPTER 2: HEROIC CHRISTIANITY

- 000 Nothing is so cheap as heaven: Pr 58 (W 243). 04
- 000 A new papal canonization process: Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 60. 05
- 000 Satires such as: Jacques LeGoff, *Money in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 39. 06
- 000 The celebrated quotation from 1 Timothy: Little, *Religious Poverty*, 36. 07
- 000 *Who were they who bought*: Pr 1 (W 67). 08
- 000 an "axial age in spirituality": For a succinct argument, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Die Achsenzeit des Hohen Mittelalters und die Ketzergeschichte," in Günther Franke and Friedrich Niewöhner, *Reformer als Ketzer: heterodoxe Bewegungen von Vorreformatoren* (Friedrich Frommann Verlag Gunther Holzboog, 2004), 101ff. 09
- 000 And just as Arthur and his knights: Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages, 1000–1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 136. 10
- 000 The people denigrated by some: Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 14, 69–74. 11
- 000 a "medieval Reformation": See, for example, B. M. Bulton, *The Medieval Reformation* (London, 1987). 12
- 000 One thirteenth-century critic marveled: Fried, *Middle Ages*, 256–57. 13
- 000 "We know that they suppose": Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 24. 14
- 000 "Wolves in sheep's clothing": Christine Caldwell Ames, *Righteous Persecution: Inquisition, Dominicans, and Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 30. 15
- 000 "[They] commonly say that": Karen Sullivan, *The Inner Lives of Medieval Inquisitors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 129. 16
- 000 Only when the Lyons merchant: Grundmann, 40–41. For a fuller account, see Euan Cameron, *The Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2001). 17
- 000 "dumb dogs who do not bark": Ames, *Righteous Persecution*, 35. 18
- 000 Lay apostolic groups who recognized: See R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2007). 19
- 000 By the time of Eckhart: Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie: l'Église et les clercs face aux béguines et aux béghards du Rhin supérieur du XIVe au XVe siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1978), 63. 20
- 000 Dominicans, who called themselves: M. Michèle Mulchahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study": *Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 41. 21

CHAPTER 3: THE DOMINICAN WAY

- 000 Why am I more glad: W 377. 22
- 000 Unlike the provincial village: Brady, *German Histories*, 23. 23
- 000 By then, the Order of Preachers: *Geschichte in Daten: Thüringen*, ed. Jürgen John, Reinhard Jonscher, and Axel Stelzner (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 1995), 95; John B. Freed, *The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century* (Washington, DC: The Mediaeval Society of America, 1977), 44ff. 24
- 000 By 1270, when ten-year-old Eckhart: Freed, *The Friars*, 330. 25
- 000 The resulting pedagogical arms race: William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order*, 2 vols. (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966 and 1973), I:283, 322–23. 26
- 000 The life of a Dominican preacher: Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on Preaching*, trans. Dominican Students Province of St. Joseph; ed. Walter M. Conlon O.P. (<http://dominicanidaho.org/humbert.pdf>), 9. 27
- 000 "carpenters, stonecutters, masons": Humbert, *Preaching*, 10. 28
- 000 There are some who, endowed with: Humbert, *Preaching*, 49–50; also cited in Little, *Religious Poverty*, 202. 29
- 000 The preaching of a single friar: Humbert, *Preaching*, 64–65. 30
- 000 "Preaching is such a noble art": *Ibid.*, 27. 31
- 000 Those few brave souls willing: *Ibid.*, 1, 18, 99. 32
- 000 Dominicans and Franciscans, by contrast: Freed, *The Friars*, 132. 33

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- 01 000 Upon his application to enter: The following description of initiation draws heavily on the accounts
 02 of Hinnebusch, *History*, I:290 ff., and Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 75–78.
 03 000 Undergarments were also woolen: Hinnebusch, *History*, I:340.
 04 000 The largely autonomous community: *Ibid.*, I:289.
 05 000 The remaining duties of the day: *Ibid.*, I:347.
 06 000 The focus on rote memorization: Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 99–101.
 07 000 During his novitiate year: Hinnebusch, *History*, I:299.
 08 000 As an advanced student: *Ibid.*, I:351.
 09 000 In these early years: *Ibid.*, I: 355–59.
 10 000 "first the bow is bent": Mulcahey takes this epigraph as the title for her excellent survey of
 11 thirteenth-century Dominican education, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," ix.
 12 000 All were fellow brothers: Hinnebusch, *History*, II:20.
 13 000 Eckhart and his fellow students attended: Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 179, 248.
 14 000 The latter class was directed: *Ibid.*, 133–36.
 15 000 Lectures on Lombard's *Sentences*: See the classic work on the topic, Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis:
 16 The Four Senses of Scripture*, 3 vols., trans. Mark Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI:
 17 Eerdmans, 1998–2009); also Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's
 18 "Sentences"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
 19 000 teaches us very clearly: *Commentary on Genesis in Essential ME*, 108.
 20 000 "each and every sentence": Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars*, 206.
 21 000 The most significant and radical transformation: R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.
 22 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 74.
 23 000 Here too, Dominicans led the way: Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 504–12.
 24 000 "each day they attend lectures": Little, *Religious Poverty*, 184.
 25 000 "Our order is recognized": Quoted in Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 3.
 26 000 "Others apply themselves": Humbert, *Preaching*, 64.
 27 000 In *On the Education of Preachers*: Humbert, *Preaching*, 4–7, 19–20.
 28 000 The most famous preacher of Eckhart's day: See Peter Segl, "Berthold von Regensburg und die
 29 Ketzer seiner Zeit," in *Festschrift Kurt Reindel, in Studien und Quellen zur Geschichte Regensburgs*, 4
 30 (Regensburg: 1987), 115–29.
 31 000 Thirteenth-century Dominican authors: Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars*, 318; Little, *Religious
 32 Poverty*, 196.
 33 000 In addition to Humbert's own: Little, *Religious Poverty*, 191.
 34 000 Jacobus de Voragine, compiler of: Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," 423.
 35 000 Other preaching aids offered: *Ibid.*, 460–62.
 36 000 A successful preacher, he was taught: Humbert, *Preaching*, 29ff.; Mulcahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in
 37 Study," 138, 481–84, 530–40.
 38 000 Every good preacher should first: Humbert, *Preaching*, 24–26.
 39 000 "The manner of delivery": *Ibid.*, 54.
 40 000 Finally, both Hugh of Saint-Cher: Little, *Religious Poverty*, 185.
 41 000 In contrast to Franciscan preachers: Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Medieval Sermons and Their
 42 Performance: Theory and Record," in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn
 43 Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 99, 108; Augustine Thompson, "From Texts to Preaching: Retrieving the
 44 Medieval Sermon as an Event," in Muessig, *Preacher*, 25.
 45 000 "As the seed is planted in preaching": *Ibid.*, 189.
 46 000 "those who cannot be understood": Humbert, *Preaching*, 32.
 47 000 "It is worth far more": *Ibid.*, 34.
 48 000 After more experience: Hinnebusch, *History*, I:263–67; Little, *Religious Poverty*, 185.
 49 000 Like students off to college: Humbert, *Preaching*, 89.
 50 000 A good preacher should not trouble himself: *Ibid.*, 108.

CHAPTER 4: THE RIGHT STATE

- 31 000 We are the cause of all: Pr 5a (W 107).
 32 000 "that perfect love of God": *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. del Mastro
 33S (Garden City, NY: Image, 1975), 61.
 34N 000 The work, known as the *Talks of Instruction*: See the discussion in Dagmar Gottschall, "Eckhart's
 German Works," in *Hackett*, 146–49.

000	We don't know if Eckhart: Loris Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher, Administrator, and Master of the Sentences: From Erfurt and Back, 1294–1313; The Origins of the <i>Opus Tripartitum</i> ," in <i>Hackett</i> , 127.	01
000	<i>People should not worry so much: Talks of Instruction</i> (W 489).	02
000	<i>In true obedience there should be:</i> W 487.	03
000	<i>[God] is little concerned:</i> W 503.	04
000	<i>Many people think they are performing:</i> W 501.	05
000	<i>Skillful diligence is required:</i> W 512.	06
000	<i>People say, "Alas, sir":</i> W 487–89.	07
000	<i>as I have often said:</i> W 490.	08
000	<i>Drawing closer to God:</i> W 519.	09
000	<i>in all his acts and in all things:</i> W 493.	10
000	<i>This above all is necessary:</i> W 512.	11
000	<i>If you have a true:</i> W 495.	12
000	<i>If a man is not drawn:</i> W 495.	13
000	<i>the greater and fiercer:</i> W 510.	14
000	<i>However great the suffering:</i> W 499.	15
000	<i>People may well be daunted:</i> W 504–5.	16
000	<i>As I have often said:</i> W 505.	17
000	<i>God in his faithfulness:</i> W 507–8.	18
000	<i>Great hope and trust:</i> W 501.	19
000	<i>Wherever a man in obedience:</i> W 486.	20
000	<i>When a man stands right:</i> W 500–501.	21
000	<i>In the right state of mind:</i> W 497.	22
000	<i>What today would be called mindfulness:</i> W 492.	23
000	<i>One is when God tells a man:</i> W 502.	24
000	<i>As I have said before:</i> W 496.	25
000	<i>But you might say:</i> W 509.	26
000	<i>Whenever a man wishes:</i> W 511.	27
000	<i>There was never so close:</i> W 510.	28
000	<i>His passing mention:</i> W 512.	29
000	<i>a light shin[ing] in the darkness:</i> W 499.	30
000	<i>You should know that:</i> W 494.	31
000	<i>Inclination to sin:</i> W 494.	32
000	<i>Willingness to sin:</i> W 499.	S33
000	<i>Amidst the unrelenting:</i> W 520.	N34
000	<i>Whatever God then sends him:</i> W 515.	
000	<i>Do not bother yourself:</i> W 521.	
000	<i>It all depends on that:</i> W 489.	
000	<i>The more deeply:</i> LW V: 142.	
000	<i>Even the pagan Ptolemy:</i> LW V:146.	
000	<i>Albert the Great, the preeminent:</i> LW V:145.	

CHAPTER 5: THE SCIENCE OF GOD

000	What is truth?: Pr 25 (W 95).	26
000	At most one in ten Dominicans: William J. Courtenay, <i>Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6; Hinnebusch, <i>History</i> , II:11; Mulcahey, "First the Bow," 231.	27
000	Eckhart's 1293–94 stay: Cf. reference to 1286 Parisian stay in Easter sermon of 1294. LW V:155.	28
000	By Eckhart's time: Jacques Verger, <i>Men of Learning in Europe at the End of the Middle Ages</i> (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 47; Senner, "Life," in <i>Hackett</i> , 11–12.	29
000	Earlier in the century, Philip Augustus: Alfred Fierro, <i>Histoire et dictionnaire de Paris</i> (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1996), 270.	30
000	In addition to the large merchant: Boris Bove and Claude Gauvard, <i>Le Paris du Moyen Age</i> (Paris: Belin, 2014), 24–25.	31
000	Even at the graduate level: Alan B. Cobban, <i>Universities in the Middle Ages</i> (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), 165.	32

- 01 000 Perhaps fortunately for the enhancement: William J. Courtenay, "Study Abroad: German Students
 02 at Bologna, Paris, and Oxford in the Fourteenth Century," in *Universities and Schooling*, ed. William J.
 03 Courtenay and Jürgen Miethke (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 18.
 04 000 Although college statutes repeatedly condemned: Cobban, *Universities*, 196–99.
 05 000 A few decades earlier, one particularly: Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New
 06 Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 269.
 07 000 The French king Philip Augustus: John W. Baldwin, *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages,
 08 1100–1300* (Lexington, MA; D. C. Heath, 1971), 49.
 09 000 Wealthy families leased entire houses: Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, 82, 88; Lynn Thorndike,
 10 *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 118, also
 11 88–98; Helene Wieruszowski, *The Medieval University: Masters, Students, Learning* (London: Andrews
 12 McMeel, 1966), 106–9.
 13 000 In theory, the Paris priory: Hinnebusch, *History*, II:38–39.
 14 000 Since their arrival in the 1220s: Cobban, *Universities*, 92–93; James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas
 15 D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 80, 93.
 16 000 As in every subject, classical Roman: Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers: An
 17 Introduction* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 28.
 18 000 Given the great cost of parchment: Verger, *Men of Learning*, 66–69; Thorndike, *University
 19 Records*, 100ff.
 20 000 Historians still debate: "Albertus saepe dicebat," LW V:145.
 21 000 During Eckhart's formative years: Hinnebusch, *History*, II:123, 125.
 22 000 In the words of a later chronicler: "War er nit gewesen, Deutschlandt wer ein eyssel bleiben," quoted
 23 in *Harvest*, 13.
 24 000 In 1248, despite much internal resistance: Hinnebusch, *History*, II:27–28.
 25 000 Between 1250 and 1350: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/medieval-philosophy/>.
 26 000 "seeking to know the incomprehensible": Thorndike, *University Records*, 80–81.
 27 000 Looking for reputable allies: Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars*, 318.
 28 000 No records survive of Eckhart's lectures: LW, V:3–16.
 29 000 Typically, a lecture would focus: *Sentences, Book 1*, chapters 13 and 185, 25, 230.
 30 000 His "Second Bachelor" status: Hinnebusch, *History*, II:31.
 31 000 The university typically waived: *Ibid.*, II:59.
 32 000 "despise simple persons who know": Thorndike, *University Records*, 171–72.
 33 000 Francis of Assisi thought: John Hine Mundy, *Europe in the High Middle Ages, 1150–1309 (General History
 34N of Europe)* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 203.
 000 How could he not feel: Verger, *Men of Learning*, 84.
 000 By the time of Eckhart's study: Cross, *Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 105–6.
 000 "Authority is the weakest form": Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars*, 218.
 000 Certainly angels were a well-embedded part: David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*
 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4–5.
 000 "The perfection of the universe": *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Question 50, article 1.
 000 Several later fathers: Keck, *Angels*, 13ff.
 000 The major intellectual work: *Ibid.*, 23, 110.
 000 A few scholars proposed a nebulous: Cross, *Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 159.
 000 "correcting Aristotle through a pious": *Ibid.*, 100.

CHAPTER 6: MASTER OF LEARNING

- 000 Now a master [i.e., Aristotle]: Pr 10 (W 335).
 000 The solemn ceremony of induction: Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas*, 98–100.
 000 The last German to receive: Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher," in *Hackett*, 128.
 000 As a Dominican, Meister Eckhart: Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, 28–29; Appendix in *Hackett*,
 722–23; Mulcahey, "First the Bow," 379.
 000 When the archbishop of Canterbury: Kurt Flasch, *Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter: Von
 Augustin zu Machiavelli* (Stuttgart: Reclams Universal-Bibliothek, 2001), 374.
 000 The most important direct Dominican influence: Markus Führer, "Dietrich of Freiberg," *The
 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/dietrich-freiberg/>; Kurt Flasch, *Dietrich von Freiberg: Philosophie,
 Theologie, Naturforschung um 1300* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), esp. 26ff.
 000 Nature, he wrote: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 99.

- 000 *Pagan masters say that God*: Pr 13 (W 159). 01
- 000 *I used to wonder*: Pr 22 (W 281). 02
- 000 *If I were in a wilderness*: Pr 78 (W 176). 03
- 000 *The masters say all creatures*: Pr 22 (W 280). 04
- 000 In the academic works that have survived: Yossef Schwartz, "Zwischen Einheitsmetaphysik und Einheitshermeneutik," in *ME in Erfurt*, 279; also Alessandro Palazzo, "Eckhart's Islamic and Jewish Sources: Avicenna, Avicbron, Averroes," in *Hackett*, 271, says Eckhart mentions Averroës forty-two times. 05
- 000 But the two non-Christian masters: Flasch, *Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter*, 277; Schwartz, "Zwischen Einheitsmetaphysik," 279. 06
- 000 The most important intellectual and spiritual: Schwartz, "Zwischen Einheitsmetaphysik," 279. 07
- 000 By the time of his elevation: Josef Koch, *Kleine Schriften* (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia e Letteratura, 1973), 211. 08
- 000 *Let me know Thee who*: Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 189. 09
- 000 Like Augustine, he compared: Pr 51 (W 407–8). 10
- 000 The Bible, according to Eckhart: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 92. 11
- 000 Every passage, he believed: Comm on John, translated in *Harvest*, 112. *Ad*
- 000 His commentary on the first line: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 96–107. 11
- 000 *I am astonished that Holy Scripture*: Pr 51 (W 407). 12
- 000 In parables, virtually every word: Comm on John (LW 3:649.3–10), translated in *Harvest*, 111. *Ad*
- 000 *I do this to arouse*: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 92. 13
- 000 *bringing honey forth*: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 93–94. 14
- 000 He conceded as much: Comm on Exodus, in *Teacher and Preacher*, 41. 14
- 000 *Please note that the preceding words*: Comm on John, in *Essential ME*, 135. 15
- 000 [Moreover], *since the literal sense*: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 93. 15
- 000 *even if the [human] author*: Eckhart quoting from Augustine's *Confessions*, in Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 93. 16
- 000 Some modern scholars have argued: Donald Duclow, "Meister Eckhart's Latin Biblical Exegesis," in *Hackett*, 321, 326; see also *Harvest*, 111. 17
- 000 For example, during Eckhart's previous stay: Cross, *Christian Medieval Philosophers*, 153. 18
- 000 Eckhart's entry into the fray: LW V:37–54. 19
- 000 According to Eckhart, *understanding*: LW V:42. 19
- 000 *I am no longer of the [Thomist] opinion*: LW V:40. See also Kurt Flasch, *ME: Philosoph des Christentums* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), 118ff. 20
- 000 Rather he sought to reverse: Alain de Libera, *La Mystique rhénane. D'Albert le Grand à Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994), 166. 21
- 000 As Thomas Aquinas explained: *Summa Theologica*, Ia, 7a, art. 8, quoted in C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 157. 22
- 000 Sometime during Eckhart's regent professorship: LW, V:55–71. 23
- 000 *Will and love fall on God*: Pr 37 (W 188). 24
- 000 *Goodness is a cloak*: Pr 9 (W 344). 24
- 000 *Love infatuates and entangles*: Pr 19 (208). 25
- 000 "In this brief volume, we have": Lombard, *Sentences*, 4–5. 25
- 000 While his fellow Franciscans revered: Roger Bacon, *Opus Minus*, ed. J. S. Brewer (1859), 325. 26
- 000 Like Albert and Dietrich, Bacon: Richard LeMay, "Roger Bacon's Attitude Toward the Latin Translations and Translators of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, No. 57 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 40–41. 27
- 000 Admirers and enemies alike: Cross, *Christian Medieval Philosophers*, 163–4. 29
- 000 Like Eckhart, Duns Scotus: *Ibid.*, 176. 29
- 000 Duns Scotus, for one: *Ibid.*, 105. 30
- 000 *to satisfy as far as possible*: LW I: 148.5–9, translated in McGinn, *Mystical Thought*, 7–8. 30
- 000 *By way of preface*: Comm on Genesis, prologue to *Opus Tripartitum*, in *Essential ME*, 82. 31
- 000 *What the philosophers have written*: LW 3:154.14–155.7, translated in McGinn, *Mystical Thought of ME*, 3. 32
- 000 In rare instances of conflict: Pr 9 (W 344). 32
- 000 Eckhart conceived of his own *summa*: See Andre Beccarisi, "Eckhart's Latin Works," in *Hackett*, 95ff. S33
- 000 The first thesis, in Part I: Prologue, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), 79. N34

- 01 000 *An image is not of itself*: Pr 14b (W 116); see also Pr 77 (W 267).
 02 000 This new position: Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher," in *Hackett*, 132–33.
 03 000 As promised in the general prologue: Maurer, *Parisian Questions*, 81.
 04 000 *Everything that exists*, in other words: *Ibid.*, 86–87.
 05 000 *All of this would seem*: *Ibid.*, 82.
 06 000 Since the *Opus* would simply touch: *Ibid.*, 105.
 07 000 *at first glance some of the*: LW 1:152.3–5, translated in McGinn, *Mystical Thought of ME*, 8.
 08 000 His "utterly original" attempt: Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher," in *Hackett*, 131.
- CHAPTER 7: KNOWING THE UNKNOWABLE GOD
- 09 000 Where is this [hidden] God?: Pr 79 (447).
 10 000 During the three decades: Fried, *Middle Ages*, 21; Hinnebusch, *History*, I:376.
 11 000 It's possible that Eckhart: Senner, "Life," in *Hackett*, 18.
 12 000 The new province contained: *Geschichte in Daten: Thüringen*, 154.
 13 000 Eckhart's new position required: Senner, "Life," in *Hackett*, 19–21.
 14 000 Not only were complaints registered: *Ibid.*, 23–27.
 15 000 "Man reaches the peak": Maurer, *Parisian Questions*, 40–41.
 16 000 "made everything I had written": Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas*, 321.
 17 000 [God]'s knowledge is the cause: Maurer, *Parisian Questions*, 48.
 18 000 If so, he nonetheless remained: *Ibid.*, 71–75.
 19 000 His inspiration, Eckhart claimed: LW V:89–90.
 20 000 *a man should not have*: *Talks of Instruction* (W 491).
 21 000 Eventually Eckhart agreed with Maimonides: Comm on Exodus, in *T&P*, 56.
 22 000 *Know that whatever you add*: *Ibid.*, 101–2.
 23 000 Specifically, Maimonides posited: *Ibid.*, 57–58.
 24 000 Eckhart streamlined this list: Pr 11 (W 347); also Pr 12.
 25 000 God, by contrast, exists: Comm. on John, in *Essential ME*, 161.
 26 000 *Nothing is so firmly opposed*: Pr 50 (W 452).
 27 000 *Some people ask how*: Pr 39 (W 307).
 28 000 From the divine perspective: Pr 20 (W 336).
 29 000 He recounted being asked: Latin Sermon 45, in *T&P*, 230.
 30 000 *all that happened a thousand years*: Pr 26 (W 95).
 31 000 In eternity, *being and youth*: Pr 83 (W 462).
 32 000 *The eternal Now*, according to Eckhart: Pr 38 (W 178).
 33 000 *If I were asked where God is*: Pr 63 (W 390).
 34 000 Borrowing a popular Neoplatonic metaphor: Pr 82 (W 404).
 000 *Where are we to look?*: Pr 20b (W 201).
 000 *Heaven is at all points equidistant*: Pr 68 (W 354); also Pr 81 (W 326).
 000 *so vast and so wide*: Pr 69 (W 233).
 000 But God has no distinctions: Comm on Genesis, in *Harvest*, 99. Eckhart is quoting Macrobius here.
 000 *God is in all things*: Pr 30 (W 133).
 000 . . . *the source of all numbers*: Comm on Wisdom; LW II:487, 366, 482.
 000 *everything that is said or written*: Feast of Holy Trinity Sermon, in *T&P*, 210.
 000 *For anyone who could grasp*: Pr 38 (W 176).
 000 *God is unnameable*: *Harvest*, 142.
 000 All attributes we would apply: Cross, *Christian Medieval Philosophers*, 117.
 000 *God is nameless because none*: Pr 83 (W 463).
 000 Neither is God wise: Pr 23 (W 287).
 000 *No distinction*, Eckhart insists: Comm on Exodus 15:3, *T&P*, 64.
 000 The only true proposition: *Ibid.*, 45–47.
 000 As Eckhart explains, "Shaddai" signifies: *Ibid.*, 94.
 000 In this sense, Eckhart agrees: Comm on Wisdom, T&P 166. ✓
 000 *we should learn not to give God*: Pr 53 (W 153).
 000 *every word that we can say*: Pr 36b (W 223); see a similar passage on Heraclitus in Pr 36a (W 219).
 000 *whatever we say of God*: Pr 20a (W 192).
 000 . . . *be silent and do not chatter*: Pr 83 (W 463).
 000 *The more one tries to speak*: Comm on Exodus, in *T&P*, 82.
 000 *it sometimes happened that they*: Pr 50 (W 452).

- 000 *the purest form of affirmation: Harvest, 139.* 01
- 000 *The existence of the One: Pr 21 (W 466).* 02
- 000 *anything we ascribe to [God]: Pr 54b (W 254).* 03
- 000 *He is as high above being: Pr 9 (W 342).* 04
- 000 *It would be better, Eckhart advised: Pr 23 (W 287). See also Pr 10 (W 343).* 05
- 000 *He is being above all being: Pr 82 (W 316).* 06
- 000 *Here the ancient authority: Pr 28 (W 131).* 07
- 000 *Scholars today debate the fidelity: Harvest, 42–45.* 08
- 000 *Proclus's ideas arrived: Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. III: *Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996), 19; De Libera, *La Mystique rhénane*, 25; *Harvest*, 42–45.* 09
- 000 *The Church Father even went: Duclow, "ME's Latin Biblical Exegesis," 332.* 10
- 000 *In 1265, Albert's disciple: De Libera, *La Mystique rhénane*, 33; also 41–53.* 11
- 000 *Even Aquinas, the supposed champion: Flasch, *Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter*, 323.* 12
- 000 *These souls were themselves the result: For a concise explanation, see Alessandro Palazzo, "Eckhart's Islamic and Jewish Sources: Avicenna, Avicbron, and Averroes," in *Hackett*, 257–62.* 13
- 000 *One image in circulation: The most notable proponents of this image were Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1175–1253) in *De Luce* (1225) and the Spanish rabbi Nahmanides (1194–1270) in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, chaps. 1–6 (1250). See A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1971). In the *Paradiso* (Canto 16), Dante also described God as a single point of light.* 14
- 000 *Do not imagine that God: Pr 101 (W 34).* 15
- 000 *God's intellect did indeed create: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 86–87.* 16
- 000 *Creation is the production: Both formulations appear in the General Prologue to the *Opus Tripartitum*, Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Wisdom, and Commentary on John, all cited in *Harvest*, 143.* 17
- 000 *Like his spiritual father Augustine: Pr 47 (W 157). See also De Libera, *La Mystique rhénane*, 269ff.* 18
- 000 *in unity, not like in likeness: Pr 13 (W 160); De Libera, *La Mystique rhénane*, 170.* 19
- 000 *You must know that all creatures: Pr 69 (W 235–36).* 20
- 000 *God, as infinite Truth and Goodness: Sermons and Lectures on Ecclesiasticus, T&P, 174.* 21
- 000 *Maimonides, like many Aristotelian-oriented scholars: Yosef Schwartz, "ME and Moses Maimonides," in *Hackett*, 389–414.* 22
- 000 *Is there then, he lamented: Pr 57 (W 170).* 23
- 000 *The same reluctance was evident: See *Harvest*, 118–124, on the concept Bernard McGinn considers the key to ME's theology.* 24
- 000 *God the Creator, he claimed: Pr 22 (W 283).* 25
- 000 *God and Godhead are as different: Pr 109 (W 293).* 26
- 000 *When someone asked me why: Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 85.* 27
- 000 *When I yet stood in my first: Pr 52 (W 424).* 28
- 000 *Intellect forces its way in: Pr 69 (W 237).* 29
- 000 *The simple ground, again only: Pr 48 (W 311).* 30

CHAPTER 8: PERNICIOUS FEMALES

- 000 *I thought of something: Pr 9 (W 326).* 31
- 000 *In Strasbourg the master encountered: Most scholars agree with this interpretation. For an opposing view on the beguines' influence, see Loris Sturlese, "ME und die cura monialium: Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem forschungsgeschichtlichen Mythos," in *MEs Straßburger Jahrzehnt*, eds. Andrés Quero-Sánchez, Georg Steer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 1–16.* 32
- 000 *In effect, they were the last remnants: The medievalist Herbert Grundmann was the first to write of a "religious 'women's movement'" during this period, in his 1935 classic study, recently translated as *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). After more than two decades of neglect, his characterization has now become part of the scholarly consensus for the twelfth and especially thirteenth centuries.* 33
- 000 *Numbering in the hundreds: Oliver Davies, *ME: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991), 69. The early work of Dayton Phillips characterized the beguine house as primarily a social and economic institution with secondary religious interests. *Beguines in Medieval Strasbourg: A Study of the Social Aspect of Beguine Life* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1941), 159. Subsequent research has stressed the multifarious but primarily religious nature of the houses, ranging from members who still lived with their parents to quasi-convents. Amalie Föbel and Anette Hettinger, *Klosterfrauen, Beginen*,* 34

- 01 *Ketzerinnen. Religiöse Lebensformen von Frauen im Mittelalter* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner, 2000), 50. There
 02 are many alternate explanations of the name's origin, including the beige robes that the women wore.
 03 *hérésie* 000 Within twenty-five years: Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 130–39.
 04 000 By 1300, for example: Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie*, 147; Otto Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und spirituelle*
 05 *Theologie. Zu MEs Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* (Munich: Artemis, 1987), 21. By
 06 the early fourteenth century, there were at least fifty-seven such houses in Frankfurt, thirty-six in Basel,
 07 and twenty-two in Nuremberg. Phillips, *Beguines*, 145; Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 135, 139, 148.
 08 000 The papal legate Gilbert of Tournai: Little, *Religious Poverty*, 132.
 09 000 The prominent canonist Hostiensis: Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 104.
 10 000 Like other lay apostolic movements: They were also called lollards, *pauperes mulierculae, beatas,*
 11 *bizzoche, pinzochere*, poor sisters, virgins, and widows. Deane, *History of Medieval Heresy*, 159;
 12 Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 164; Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie*, 65.
 13 000 At the end of the spectrum: McGinn, *Flowering*, 159; Kurt Ruh, *ME: Theologe, Prediger, Mystiker*
 14 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1985), 99.
 15 000 Nikolaus of Bibra, a poet: Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 147; *Geschichte in Daten: Thüringen*, 98.
 16 000 Not long after assuming office: Winfried Trusen, *Der Prozess gegen Meister Eckhart, Vorgeschichte,*
 17 *Verlauf und Folgen* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1988), 25.
 18 000 The following year, the newly consecrated archbishop: Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 185.
 19 000 Marguerite, in William's view: McGinn, *Flowering*, 245.
 20 000 The third reason for William's: Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre
 21 Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 68–78. The current scholarly consensus, however,
 22 seems to be in favor of genuine beguine status.
 23 000 "Men of theology and scholars": *Mirror*, Prologue and chapters 9, 12, 13.
 24 000 "in the whole of a kingdom": Edmund Colledge, J. C. Marler, and Judith Grant, "Interpretative
 25 Essay," in *Mirror*, il.
 26 000 "[annihilated] souls . . . do not make": *Mirror*, 18.
 27 000 Even a hostile chronicler: Colledge et al., *Mirror*, ix, xlvii.
 28 000 After first resolving the question: Thorndike, *University Records*, 149–50.
 29 000 Here the text of Marguerite de Porete's: *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard
 30 McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 493.
 31 000 One modern historian has characterized: Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy in Medieval*
 32 *Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 19.
 33 000 Twice—from 1261 to 1263: Sandrine Turck, *Les dominicains à Strasbourg: entre prêche, prière et mendicité*
 34 *(1224–1420)* (Strasbourg: Société savante d'Alsace, 2002), 33–40.
 35 000 Two thirds of the city's eighty-five: Phillips, *Beguines*, 217.
 36 000 Educated at the University of Bologna: Wilhelm Wiegand, "Johann, "Bischof von Straßburg," in
 37 *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1881), vol. 14: 418–19; Joseph Fuchs,
 38 "Johann I," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1974), vol. 10: 537.
 39 000 In addition to frequent interventions: LW, V:158–181.
 40 000 The first, and most straightforward: LW, V:161–163.
 41 000 Attempts to establish a new Dominican: LW, V:173.
 42 000 The details of this monumental transition: I strongly concur with Loris Sturlese (*ME: Ein Porträt*
 43 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1993), 18, and Kurt Ruh (*ME*, 95ff) on the significance of this turning
 44 point in Eckhart's life.
 45 000 Although he had visited the Strasbourg: There were 110 friars resident in 1290. Turck, *Les*
 46 *Dominicains*, 119.
 47 000 Eckhart first appears in Strasbourg's: LW V:182–83.
 48 000 A similar document two: Property donation to the Dominican female cloister of St. Markus on
 49 November 13, 1316. LW V:184–85.
 50 000 Whenever this formal appointment: Davies, *ME*, 71
 51 000 Surviving deeds and other financial records: LW, V:184–88; Turck, *Les Dominicains*, 139–150, 260–263.
 52 000 Its cohorts, officially capped: Turck, *Les Dominicains*, 128.
 53 000 The city of twenty thousand: Phillips, *Beguines*, 7.
 54 000 His surviving German sermons: LW V:187–89; Ruh, *ME*, 12.
 55 000 Most significantly, he co-resided: Trusen, *Der Prozess*, 21; *Geschichte in Daten: Thüringen*, 155.
 56 000 His own German sermon: Pr 52 (W 420–26).
 57 000 Eckhart's fellow theologian Godfrey: Colledge, et al., "Interpretive Essay," in *Mirror*, xl–xli.
 58 000 More than a century earlier: See Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. II of *The Presences of*
 59 *God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 333–37.

- 000 The period 1250–1350: See especially Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). 01
- 000 “Ah Lord,” she sighed: Mechthild of Magdeburg: *Selections from The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, ed. Elizabeth A. Anderson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 48. On Mechthild, see also Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2000); and Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995). 02
- 000 He responded that it was her: Anderson, *Mechthild*, 56. 03
- 000 “Now I fear God”: *Ibid.*, 52. 04
- 000 “I was warned about”: *Ibid.*, 47. 05
- 000 Mechthild’s work, *The Flowing*: Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 5. 06
- 000 The Soul is a “full-grown bride”: McGinn, *Flowering*, 237; Anderson, *Mechthild*, 36. 07
- 000 Whereas Marguerite envisioned: Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 64. 08
- 000 Lack of food, drink, and sleep: Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung*, 60–79; Davies, *ME*, 74–75. 09
- 000 As the *Book of Twelve Beguines*: Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 110. 10
- 000 The beguine Hadewijch of Antwerp: Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung*, 117ff. 11
- 000 The liturgical calendar and nearby statues: *Ibid.*, 122. 12
- 000 A century earlier, for instance: Fried, *Middle Ages*, 267. 13
- 000 In Eckhart’s day, the Premonstratensian: McGinn, *Flowering*, 283. 14
- 000 Another contemporary, Christina of Stommeln: McGinn, *Flowering*, 177–79. 15
- 000 *Now you might ask*: Pr 103 (W 59–60). 16
- 000 *[I]t is great foolishness*: Pr 33 (W 402). 17
- 000 About the time of his arrival: The date of this book is contested, with composition estimates ranging from 1309 to 1324. See Dagmar Gottschall, “Eckhart’s German Works,” in Hackett, 150–51. 18
- 000 *misfortunes occurring to outward goods*: *Book of Divine Comfort* (W 524). 19
- 000 *There is solace for every sorrow*: *Book of Divine Comfort* (W 526, 528). 20
- 000 *probably no one can be found*: *Book of Divine Comfort* (W 533). 21
- 000 *a man should take all things*: *Book of Divine Comfort* (W 527–30). 22
- 000 Such “corporeal” and “spiritual” experiences: Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung*, 221–22; Bernard McGinn, “Visio Dei: Seeing God in Medieval Theology and Mysticism,” in Carolyn Muessig, ed., *Envisioning Heaven: An Introduction*, 16. See also Pr 72 (W 459). 23
- 000 *Some people want to see God*: Pr 16b (W117). 24
- 000 He did not go as far: McGinn, “Visio Dei,” 18–19. 25
- 000 According to one admiring chronicler: From Gertrude the Great’s *Legatus divinae pietatis*, translated in McGinn, *Flowering*, 267. 26
- 000 *Whoever seeks God in a special*: Pr 5b (W 110). 27
- 000 “We think that in the Eucharist”: Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 156. 28
- 000 *Wisdom*, he explains: Pr 40 (W 320). 29
- 000 *When God made man*: Pr 6 (W 330). 30
- 000 *a woman and a man are unlike*: Pr 27 (W 101). 31
- 000 *we use the word homo*: Pr 20 (W 45). 32
- 000 His response was not recorded: LW V:187–188; Ruh, *ME*, 12. 33
- 000 *no earthly wisdom can grasp it*: LW V:188. 34

CHAPTER 9: MASTER OF LIVING

- 000 Better one master of life: Franz Pfeiffer, *ME* (1857; reproduced Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), 599, 19–21, translated in McGinn, *Mystical Eckhart*, 1. 28
- 000 [T]here is not one of you: Pr 66 (W 301). 29
- 000 The only Latin works: Eckhart makes references to commentaries on Isaiah, Matthew, Romans, and Hebrews, but none has survived. Dietmar Mieth, *Die Einheit von vita activa und vita contemplativa in den deutschen Predigten und Traktaten MEs und bei Johannes Tauler* (Regensburg: Pustet Friedrich KG, 1995), 113. 30
- 000 In a few sermons, he mentions: Cf. references to “mîn buoch” in Pr 14 and Pr 28. I find convincing the argument of Sturlese, *Porträt*, 16. For a prominent dissenting voice, see Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abenländische Mystik*, vol. 3, *Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996), 301–3. 31

N34

- 01 000 *Humility is a root of all good*: Pr 14 (W 267).
 02 000 *That is true humility*: Pr 49 (W 439).
 03 000 *so long as the intellect*: Pr 104 (W 50).
 04 000 *The light of the sun*: Pr 70 (W 231).
 05 000 *There is no way man can know*: Pr 104 (W 50).
 06 000 The Neoplatonic modification: Again, I am persuaded by the argument of Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher," in *Hackett*, 129.
 07 000 Applying his famed razor: See the overview of Ockham's approach in Cross, *Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 189–209.
 08 000 According to Bernard of Clairvaux: Sermon on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, quoted in Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars*, 203.
 09 000 "learning things curious and subtle": Thorndike, *University Records*, 73.
 10 000 His revered mentor, Albert the Great: Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 199.
 11 000 Eckhart believed that *words*: Pr 18 (W 213).
 12 000 The Luke annunciation excerpt: Pr 22 (W 279).
 13 000 On a few occasions he proceeded: Pr 44 (W 143–46).
 14 000 Preaching on Ecclesiasticus 50:6–7: Pr 9 (W 344).
 15 000 called "music of abstraction": *Von der Wahrheit* (1947), 897. I borrow this reference from Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 192.
 16 000 Similar modifications supplied him: The most important work on Eckhart's literary innovations is Frank Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986). I am also indebted to the discussion of this topic in Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 188–91.
 17 000 *Divine love is like the salt*: Pr 22 (W 282).
 18 000 Some of these metaphors: Frank Tobin, "Mechtild of Magdeburg and ME," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 1997), 46.
 19 000 Accordingly this metaphor led Eckhart: No Pr, W 442.
 20 000 In one even more remarkable passage: Pr 30 (W 140).
 21 000 One scholar has likened: Davies, *ME*, 116.
 22 000 *God is a word*: Pr 53 (W 152).
 23 000 *God is nothing*: Pr 82 (W 316–17).
 24 000 *God was a becoming without becoming*: Pr 50 (W 453); see also Pr 83 (W 462).
 25 000 *breadth without breadth, expanseless expanse*: Pr 38 (W 178).
 26 000 *You should live Him as He is*: Pr 83 (W 463).
 27 000 *You should wholly sink*: Pr 83 (W 463–4).
 28 000 *The text which I have quoted*: Pr 71 (W 137).
 29 000 *Now let us turn this phrase*: Pr 3 (W 165).
 30 000 Christian figures—particularly Augustine: E.g., Pr 80 (W 456); others plus secondary from Hackett.
 31 000 *yesterday a question was debated*: Pr 74 (W 374).
 32 000 Dozens of times he prefaced: See, for example, Pr 24 (W 450), Pr 58 (W 244), Pr 6 (W 331), Pr 74 (W 374), Pr 3 (W 166), Pr 51 (W 409).
 33 000 *You often ask*, for instance: Pr 16b (W 116).
 34 000 *But sir, you ask*: Pr 101 (W 30).
 000 *Last night I thought*: Pr 14 (W 267); Pr 82 (W 281).
 000 *I was thinking last night*: Pr 51 (W 409–10).
 000 *Often I feel afraid*: Pr 73 (W 373).
 000 *I will tell you how*: Pr 64 (W 393).
 000 *I was thinking on the way*: Pr 74 (W 376–377); Pr 22 (W 282).
 000 *As I was coming here today*: Pr 48 (W 309).
 000 *Dear children*, he pleaded: Pr 64 (W 393).
 000 *Just listen to one word*: Pr 74 (W 378).
 000 *I will say one word*: Pr 69 (W 237).
 000 *This is a sermon for All Saints*: Pr 63 (W 390).
 000 *Here some folk will say*: Pr 29 (W 125).
 000 *Since our understanding is a changing*: No Pr (W 441).
 000 *Whoever has understood this*: Pr 56 (W 294).
 000 In seeking to emphasize: Pr 73 (W 372).
 000 *If God gave me anything*: Pr 15 (W 270).

- 000 *I am the cause of God's being God:* Pr 52 (W 424). Eckhart also began the sermon by noting: *I beg you for the love of God to understand this wisdom if you can; but if you can't understand it, don't worry, because I am going to speak of such truth that few good people can understand* (W 420). 01
- 000 *St. Augustine says, what a man:* Pr 5a (W 105). 02
- 000 *the soul is made of all:* Pr 3 (W 165); Pr 6 (W 329). 03
- 000 *If you could know with:* Pr 2 (W 81). 04
- 000 *Some masters would hold:* Pr 9 (W 341). 05
- 000 *I have been asked to make:* Pr 105 (W 122). 06
- 000 *He was fond of clarifications:* Pr 47 (W 156). 07
- 000 *References to slow-witted persons:* Comm on Book of Wisdom (W 474). 08
- 000 *I marvel how some priests:* Pr 29 (W 196). 09
- 000 *there are some people:* Pr 41 (W 241). 10
- 000 *many a dull-witted man:* *Book of Comfort*, Part III (W 553). 11

CHAPTER 10: THE WAYLESS WAY

- 000 *Whoever is seeking God:* Pr 5b (W 110). 12
- 000 ~~KEY PHRASE NEEDED: 1st paragraph under "Making Room for God":~~ Sturlese, "Eckhart as Preacher," in Hackett, 132. 13
- 000 *One [way] is to seek God:* Pr 86 (W 86). 14
- 000 *This approach appealed:* McGinn, *Flowering*, 115–17. 15
- 000 *I used sometimes to say:* Pr 74 (W 374). 16
- 000 *He who would see God:* Pr 72 (W 460). 17
- 000 *anyone who wishes to hear God:* Comm on Genesis, in *Essential ME*, 114. 18
- 000 *The second way into God:* Pr 86 (W 86). 19
- 000 *The third way, the master concluded:* Pr 86 (W 87). 20
- 000 *How marvelous, to be without:* *Ibid.* 21
- 000 *Is it better to do something:* Pr 101 (W 33). 22
- 000 *When Jesus preached:* Pr 52 (W 420). 23
- 000 *all you need is right intention:* Pr 29 (W 125). 24
- 000 *No one should think:* Pr 68 (W 355). 25
- 000 *And so I say again:* R 66 (W 301). 26
- 000 *Now I say, as I said before:* Pr 101 (W 33). 27
- 000 *If anyone were to ask me:* Pr 38 (W 177). 28
- 000 *The advanced seeker has already completed:* Pr 84 (W 415). 29
- 000 *The first is that fear, hope:* No Pr (W 380). 30
- 000 *Similarly, for a man to have:* Pr 68 (W 3 53). 31
- 000 *makes a man greatest of all:* Pr 74 (W 374). 32
- 000 *The just man seeks nothing:* Pr 39 (W 305). 33
- 000 *all attachment to any work* Pr 2 (W 78). 34
- 000 *Anyone who desires something:* Pr 1 (W 67). 35
- 000 *If one prays for [anything]:* Pr 65 (W 64). 36
- 000 *If you are sick and pray:* Pr 25 (W 91–92). 37
- 000 *Suppose I came to the pope:* *Book of Divine Comfort* (W 552). 38
- 000 *Anyone who seeks anything in God:* Pr 62 (W 289). 39
- 000 *Looking for something with God:* Pr 4 (W 226). 40
- 000 *The most powerful prayer:* *Talks of Instruction* (W 487). 41
- 000 *for God is above names:* Pr 53 (W 153). 42
- 000 *Strip God of all his clothing:* Pr 40 (W 318). 43
- 000 *Whatever is familiar to you:* Pr 102 (W 43). 44
- 000 *therefore I pray to God:* Pr 52 (W 424). 45
- 000 *Cease to be this or that:* Pr 77 (262). 46
- 000 *Our Lord, Eckhart reminded:* Pr 10 (W 337). 47
- 000 *It is lamentable how some:* Pr 11 (W 350). 48
- 000 *As long as you mind yourself:* Pr 28 (W 132). 49
- 000 *When some of his listeners:* Pr 16b (W 116). 50
- 000 *If you would know truth clearly:* Pr 69 (W 234). 51
- 000 *Similarly, memory, understanding, and will:* Pr 103 (W 55–56). 52

13-2d
 The German sermons that have survived

- 01 000 *for as long as you want more*: Pr 11 (W 347).
 02 000 *therefore a man must be slain*: Pr 29 (W 127).
 03 000 *A man once came to me*: Pr 28 (W 130).
 04 000 *In all a man does*: Pr 62 (W 291).
 05 000 *is to be silent and let God*: Pr 101 (W 33).
 06 000 Typically, the seeker was more aware: Pr 68 (W 353).
 07 000 *all your activity must cease*: Pr 103 (W 55–56).
 08 000 *Sir, you place all*: Pr 102 (W 43).
 09 000 *Now you might say, "Oh str . . ."*: Pr 103 (W 55–58).
 10 000 *I have a power in my soul*: Pr 68 (W 352).
 11 000 *The masters, he notes*: Pr 24 (W 449), Pr 2 (W 80).
 12 000 It is *uncreated and uncreatable*: Pr 13 (W 161), Pr 48 (W 310), No Pr (W 381).
 13 000 *This power alone is free*: Pr 2 (W 79).
 14 000 Like its divine source: Pr 42 (W 399).
 15 000 *There is a fine saying*: Pr 101 (W 35).
 16 000 The entire point of radical: Pr 79 (W 446).
 17 000 Eckhart compared the liberated *divine spark*: Pr 60 (W 248).
 18 000 *The heavenly Father speaks*: Pr 19 (W 207).
 19 000 *The nature of a word*: Pr 101 (W 34). See also Pr 73 (W 372).
 20 000 It is the *voice crying out*: Pr 104 (W 52).
 21 000 *Anything you see, or anything*: Pr 71 (W 140–41).
 22 000 *so that the divine light*: Pr 45 (W 185).
 23 000 The birth of the Son: For references to the ancient Fathers on this topic, David W. T. Brattston, *see*
 24 *Traditional Christian Ethics: Affirmative or Positive Commandments* (Nashville: WestBow Press, 2014), II:91.
 25 000 *I have often said that the soul*: Pr 57 (W 169).
 26 000 *To be ready to receive God's*: Pr 2 (W 77).
 27 000 *You need not seek Him*: Pr 103 (W 58).
 28 000 *Whenever a man humbles himself*: Pr 22 (W 281).
 29 000 *God's comfort is pure and unmixed*: Pr 79 (W 446).
 30 000 *If anyone were to rob God*: Pr 69 (W 234).
 31 000 *The divine birth, after all*: Pr 11 (W 347).
 32 000 *You should not take this*: Pr 5b (W 109).
 33 000 *we are an only son whom*: Pr 22 (W 281).
 34 000 Eckhart's astonishing expansion: No Pr (W 441–43).
 000 *God is ever at work*: Pr 43 (W 394).
 000 *And so, if a man is to know God*: Pr 46 (W 255).
 000 *And so, he attempted to clarify*: Pr 22 (W 280).
 000 *For between your human nature*: Pr 24 (W 450).
 000 The actors and the act: Pr 103 (W 58).
 000 *You must know, Eckhart explains*: Pr 76 (W 72).
 000 *The eye with which I see God*: Pr 12 (W 298).
 000 *united but not one with*: Pr 64 (W 392).
 000 *Spiritual vessels are different*: Pr 16b (W 114).
 000 *The soul in God*: Pr 76 (W 74).
 000 Just as God is everywhere: Pr 63 (W 390).
 000 *Whatever is in God*: Pr 3 (W 167).
 000 *It is question difficult to answer*: Pr 47 (W 157).
 000 The inner man, or *bare substantial being*: No Pr (W 359).
 000 *I have said before and say again*: Pr 78 (W 175).
 000 *It would be of little value*: Comm on John, in McGinn, *Harvest*, 153.

CHAPTER 11: LIVING WITHOUT A WHY

- 31 000 The just man has such need: Pr 41 (W 239).
 32 000 *when a man accommodates himself*: Pr 82 (W 320).
 33S 000 *The truly humble man*, according to Eckhart: Pr 14 (W 267).
 000 *This man now dwells*: Pr 15 (W 271).
 34N 000 *Some people*, Eckhart preaches: Pr 86 (W 89).
 000 *In very truth I believe*: Pr 101 (W 37).

000	Some people say, "If I have God . . .": Pr 29 (W 125).	01
000	the highest perfection of the spirit: Pr 67 (W 358-59).	02
000	It may well be that those: No Pr (W 215-16).	03
000	For most people who have experienced: Pr 67 (W 359).	04
000	In his freewheeling translation: Pr 2 (W 77).	05
000	Now attend, and follow me closely: Pr 2 (W 78).	06
000	This is my commandment: Pr 27 (W 99).	07
000	Properly considered, love: Pr 4 (W 226).	08
000	As long as we are not like God: Comm on John, in <i>Essential ME</i> , 172.	09
000	In a later vernacular sermon, however: Pr 86 (W 84).	10
000	Martha, on the other hand: Pr 86 (W 89).	11
000	This was the meaning of living: <i>Harvest</i> , 188.	12
000	In the same way as God: Pr 41 (W 239).	13
000	Following the divine birth: Pr 6 (W 331).	14
000	If someone asked [the just man]: Pr 26 (W 96).	15
000	You must love all men: Pr 5a (W 105).	16
000	Jesus, himself, Eckhart reminded: <i>Book of Divine Comfort</i> (W 532).	17
000	The transformed individual: <i>Ibid</i> .	18
000	Though it should entail: Pr 25 (W 92).	19
000	When Jesus is led before Pilate: Reiner Schürmann, <i>Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy</i> (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne, 2001), 72	20
000	This was not an ecstatic flight: I am indebted to Reiner Schürmann, <u>Wandering Joy</u> , especially 14-15 and 32-36, for this insight. <i>It'd.</i>	21
000	So it is with all: Pr 103 (W 59).	22
000	The bond between the divine essence: "Feast of Holy Trinity Sermon," T&P, 212.	23
000	Do you want to know what sin is?: Pr 32 (W 277).	24
000	God knows nothing outside: Pr 5a (W 104).	25
000	So while God makes merry: Pr 79 (W 445).	26
000	God always rewards: Comm on John, in <i>Essential ME</i> , 151.	27
000	God likes forgiving big sins: Pr 4 (W 225).	28
000	If a man slays another: Pr 63 (W 388).	29
000	In every work, even in an evil: Comm on John, in <i>Essential ME</i> , 44, n. 494.	30
000	Should anyone ask what God is: Pr 65 (W 62-63).	31
000	The question is asked, what burns: Pr 5b (W 109).	32
000	Now you might say, "Bad people": Pr 74 (W 375).	33
000	All good works, he seems to say: Pr 105 (W 120-21).	34
000	fasts, vigils, prayers, and the rest: Pr 1 (W 66).	35
000	People, what is it: Spruch 8, Franz Pfeiffer, <i>ME</i> (1857); reproduced Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924, 599.19-21, translated in McGinn, <i>The Mystical Thought of ME</i> , 1.	36
000	unworthy [and] unbelieving people: Pr 51 (W 410).	37
000	God knows nothing but being: Pr 8 (W 404).	38
000	Feeling I have in common: Pr 4 (W 225).	39
000	whatever is in God, is God: Pr 12 (W 297). <i>not hold!</i>	40
000	And seeing that God transforms: Pr 3 (W 167).	41
000	Why did God become man?: Pr 29 (W 126).	42
000	The incarnation was the greatest: Pr 22 (W 279).	43
000	St. Augustine says, what a man: Pr 5a (W 105).	44
000	In fact I will say still: Pr 48 (W 310).	45
000	They meet and unite: Pr 28 (W 131).	46
000	A great master says that his: Pr 52 (W 424).	47
000	In my birth all things: Pr 52 (W 424).	48
000	The concept of the ground: For a more extensive analysis of Eckhart's <i>grunt</i> , see the discussion in McGinn, <i>Mystical Thought of ME</i> , 114-61.	49

CHAPTER 12: DEVIL'S SEED

000	And some will say that such: W 553.	S33
000	The years of Eckhart's stay: For an excellent overview of this crisis, see William Chester Jordan, <i>The Great Famine</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).	N34

- 01 000 In August 1317, he published: Alexander Patschovsky, "Straßburger Beginenverfolgungen im 14.
 02 Jahrhundert," in *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, Bd. 30 (1974), 133–42.
- 03 000 Some modern historians have suggested: Martina Wehrli-Johns, "Mystik und Inquisition: Die
 04 Dominikaner und die sogenannte Häresie des Freien Geistes," in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländlichen
 05 Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte: Kolloquium
 06 Kloster Fischingen, 1998*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Niemeyer,
 07 1999), 243.
- 08 000 Half a century earlier: *Harvest*, 59; Pr 52 (W 424).
- 09 000 "They say they ought not to": *Harvest*, 89.
- 10 000 The beguines he ministered to: Patschovsky, "Straßburger Beginenverfolgungen," 95–107.
- 11 000 Early the next year he circulated: Winfried Trusen, *Der Prozess gegen Meister Eckhart: Vorgeschichte,
 12 Verlauf und Folgen* (Schönigh, 1988), 29.
- 13 000 The Dominican priory of the city: G. M. Lohr, *Beiträge zu Geschichte des Kölner Dominikanerklosters im
 14 Mittelalter* (Leipzig, 1920), 34–36.
- 15 000 Certainly he lectured regularly: Trusen, *Der Prozess*, 63.
- 16 000 He was personally familiar with: Ulrich Seng, *Heinrich zweite von Virneburg als Erzbischof von Köln*
 17 (Cologne: F. Schmitt, 1977), 75ff.
- 18 000 The year before Eckhart's arrival: Lerner, *Free Spirit Heresy*, 29–30.
- 19 000 Heinrich of Virneburg was the type: Seng, *Heinrich*, 17.
- 20 000 He had not attended university: *Ibid.*, 41, 121ff.
- 21 000 While the conflict raged on: Davies, *ME*, 44; Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 42.
- 22 000 Originally scheduled to take place: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 46; McGinn, *Mysticism*, 14; Trusen,
 23 *Der Prozess*, 188.
- 24 000 "that some dishonest and indecent": Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 47.
- 25 000 One or more unidentified friars: *Ibid.*, 49.
- 26 000 Upon return to Cologne: *Ibid.*, 50–51.
- 27 000 Faced with certain punishment: *Ibid.*, 52.
- 28 000 Upon arriving in Aachen: *Ibid.*
- 29 000 Most of Eckhart's brethren: Ingeberg Degenhardt, *Studium zum Wandel des Eckhartbildes* (Leiden:
 30 Brill, 1967), 13. My description of Eckhart's trials in Cologne and Avignon draws heavily on the careful
 31 research of Senner, "Life," in *Hackett*, 44–81, and Trusen, *Der Prozess*, esp. 105 ff.
- 32 000 according to the exemption: *Essential ME*, 71.
- 33 000 To clarify the objections: *Ibid.*, 72–73.
- 34 000 They think that everything: *Ibid.*, 75.
- 000 Know that these articles: *Ibid.*, 76.
- 000 When he came before the two: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 66–67.
- 000 While he had promptly replied: *Ibid.*, 65.
- 000 While waiting for the outcome: I am grateful to Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 71, for this
 interpretation.
- 000 *I Meister Eckhart*: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 68.
- 000 "We have arrived at the decision": *Ibid.*, 71.
- 000 "unholy Babylon, thou sink of iniquity": Guillaume Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon, 1305–78* (London:
 Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 279.
- 000 Within the space of two decades: Bernard Guillemain, *La Cour Pontificale d'Avignon (1309–76): Étude
 d'une Société* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1962), 551.
- 000 Since 1100, a series of popes: Yves Renouard, *La papauté à Avignon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires,
 1955), 37.
- 000 Papal ambassadors from across Europe: Mollat, *The Popes*, 280.
- 000 Even so, once the necessary clerks: *Ibid.*, 307.
- 000 At least five hundred people: *Ibid.*, 283.
- 000 Six years earlier, John had bought: Edwin Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon: A Century in Exile* (New York:
 BlueBridge, 2007), 52.
- 000 The year 1327 saw the peak: Guillemain, *La Cour Pontificale*, 443.
- 000 Even the Dominican priory: Paul Amargier, "Le couvent dominicain d'Avignon de ses origines à la
 peste noire," *Études vauclusiennes*, no. 5 (1971), 21–30.
- 000 The archbishop's inquisitors: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 72–74; Trusen, *Der Prozess*, 114–15.
- 000 In effect, it was now a censure case: Trusen, *Der Prozess*, 118.
- 000 Historians have judged him: C. W. Previte-Orton, *The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*
 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 1:836; Mollat, *The Popes*, 23.

000	Tightening central control of the benefices: Mollat, <i>The Popes</i> , 14; Mullins, <i>The Popes of Avignon</i> , 55.	01
000	By the time of Eckhart's arrival: Davies, <i>ME</i> , 50; Spufford, <i>Money and Its Uses</i> , 157; Mullins, <i>The Popes of Avignon</i> , 48; Ruh, <i>ME</i> , 183.	02
000	Two thirds of the pope's expanded income: Mollat, <i>The Popes</i> , 316.	03
000	Beginning with four or five lists: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 74–76.	03
000	The articles singled out: <i>Essential ME</i> , 78–79.	04
000	The <i>eternal Now</i> was a tenet: <i>Ibid.</i> , 40–41.	04
000	A similarly scholastic difference: <i>Ibid.</i> , 79.	05
000	Such fine distinctions were the stuff: <i>Ibid.</i> , 116.	05
000	<i>We shall all be transformed</i> : <i>Ibid.</i> , 78.	06
000	But early in the new year: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 77.	07
000	profess[ing] the Catholic faith: <i>Essential ME</i> , 81.	07
000	Most articles were condemned: Koch, <i>Kleine Schriften</i> , 384.	08
000	The pope clearly valued: Senner, "Life," in Hackett, 78–79.	08
000	we are indeed sad to report: <i>Essential ME</i> , 77.	09
000	censures only fifteen: <i>Ibid.</i> , 80.	09
000	Three weeks later, on April 15: Ruh, <i>ME</i> , 186.	10

CHAPTER 13: THE MAN FROM WHOM GOD HID NOTHING

000	If anyone cannot understand: Pr 52 (W 424).	12
000	In 1356, the Benedictine monk: Lerner, <i>Free Spirit</i> , 216–21; <i>Harvest</i> , 344–49.	13
000	"the man from whom God hid nothing": This is the title of the first "sayings" attributed to ME, first published in Pfeiffer, <i>ME</i> , 597.	14
000	Almost all of the portrayals: For a significant exception, see the "good cook's" criticisms in <i>Erroneous Teachings of ME</i> , in Bernard McGinn, <i>The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 1350–1550</i> (New York: Crossroad, 2012), etc. ^{71–76.}	15
000	A 1353 Dutch treatise: Degenhardt, <i>Studium</i> , 27.	16
000	Few friars openly criticized: Trusen, <i>Der Prozess</i> , 155, 162.	17
000	Profoundly depressed by his own unworthiness: Henry Suso, <i>The Exemplar with Two German Sermons</i> , ed. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 105.	18
000	"one of the most learned and experienced": <i>Ibid.</i> , 308.	19
000	Finally he explicitly distinguishes: <i>Ibid.</i> , 326–27.	19
000	"some uneducated but intelligent people": <i>Ibid.</i> , 58	20
000	Speculative theology, which we learned: <i>Ibid.</i> , 57.	20
000	The Little Book of Truth was aimed: <i>Ibid.</i> , 59.	21
000	"The more bitterly you have suffered": Suso, <i>The Exemplar</i> , 241.	21
000	It was in one of these Rhineland cities: Josef Schmidt, "Introduction," in <i>Johannes Tauler: Sermons</i> , trans. Maria Shradly, <i>Classics of Western Spirituality</i> (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 5.	22
000	According to Tauler, every human: See, for instance, Sermon 1 (35–40) and Sermon 19 (69–73) in <i>Johannes Tauler</i> .	23
000	This was the period of greatest persecution: Ingrid Würth, <i>Geisler in Thüringen: Die Entstehung einer spätmittelalterlichen Häresie</i> (Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 432ff.; Lerner, <i>Free Spirit Heresy</i> , 145; Grundmann, <i>Religious Movements</i> , 245.	24
000	Theologians who appropriated: Degenhardt, <i>Studium</i> , 20; Koch, <i>Kleine Schriften</i> , 438–43.	25
000	Eckhart's mistake, he wrote: <i>Essential ME</i> , 24; Degenhardt, <i>Studium</i> , 52; Elizabeth Brient, "ME's Influence on Nicholas of Cusa: A Survey of the Literature," in Hackett, 557.	26
000	Some Dominican chronicles vaguely: Degenhardt, <i>Studium</i> , 71–73.	27
000	In 1516, the thirty-three-year-old theology professor: See <i>Harvest</i> , 392–404.	28
000	The future reformer's greatest objection: Volker Leppin, <i>Die fremde Reformation: Luthers mystische Wurzeln</i> (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016), 31–41.	29
000	Luther likely read at least: <i>Ibid.</i> , 204.	30
000	Protestant publications of Tauler's sermon: Degenhardt, <i>Studium</i> , 69–70.	30
000	A 1522 publication on mysticism I am very grateful to Bernard McGinn for sharing with me his unpublished paper on the topic. See also Andrew Weeks, "ME and Valentin Weigel" in Hackett, 607–27. STW	31
000	Sudermann also composed: <i>Ibid.</i> , 94	32
000	Protestant embrace of some medieval mystics: <i>Ibid.</i> , 85.	S33
000	Thus while many of: Davies, <i>ME</i> , 215.	N34

Degenhardt, ~~etc.~~
Studium

- 01 000 "beautiful splendid times, when Europe": Tobin, *Mechthild*, 18.
 02 000 "branded as heretical all imagination": Ibid., 18.
 03 000 "Eckhart is rightly called the Master": See especially the enlightening discussion of Cyril O'Reagan, "Eckhart's Reception in the 19th Century," in Hackett, 629–67; also Degenhardt, *Studium*, 112–14.
 04 000 Hegel's student Karl Rosenkranz: Ruh, *ME*, 14.
 05 000 Protestant philosophers, such as: Degenhardt, *Studium*, 146.
 06 000 In his *History of Mysticism*: Tobin, *Mechthild*, 26.
 07 000 Accusations of atheism: Degenhardt, *Studium*, 156–65.
 08 000 In his *German Mysticism*: Tobin, *Mechthild*, 23.
 09 000 In 1886, the Dominican: *ME in Erfurt*, 110.
 10 000 An influential 1904 article: Kurt Flasch, *ME: Philosopher of Christianity*, trans. Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 161.
 11 000 Greatly embellished portrayals: Degenhardt, *Studium*, 240.
 12 000 New Catholic accounts: Ibid., 288.
 13 000 In Rosenberg's fantasy: Ruh, *ME*, 14; also Degenhardt, *Studium*, 259.
 14 000 In 1935, the Jesuit theologian: Flasch, *ME*, 195.
 15 000 In 1937, Quint joined the Nazi party: Ibid., 162.
 16 000 The postmodern deconstructionist: Dermot Moran, "Meister Eckhart in Twentieth-Century Philosophy," in Hackett, 697.
 17 000 No twentieth-century philosopher: See especially the astute overview of Moran in Hackett, 687–96.
 18 000 "the dark self-perception": Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Self* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 152.
 19 000 Yet as the scholars Amy Hollywood: Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History, Religion and Post-Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), esp. 155ff.; Morgan, *On Becoming God*, 82–87.
 20 000 Contrary to his former mentor: ^{C. G. J.} ~~Jolande Jacobi and R. F. C. Hull, eds.,~~ ^{C. G. J.} ~~C. G. Jung: Psychological Reflections~~ (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 340.
 21 000 When searching for inroads: Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, A. Jaffe & R. and C. Winston, eds. (New York: Vintage, 1961), 68–69.
 22 000 "The art of letting things happen": Carl Jung, commentary in Richard Wilhelm, trans., *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962), 93.
 23 000 Eckhart's pivotal insight: *Psychological Types*, in *Collected Works*, ed. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 254.
 24 000 We tried to have the censure: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meister_Eckhart#cite_note-rehab-118.
 25 000 "the one Zen thinker of the West": Cited in Matthew Fox, *ME: A Mystic-Warrior for Our Times* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014), 36.
 26 000 Letting-go-ness lines up: See the intriguing comparisons of Hee-Sung Keel, *ME, An Asian Perspective* (Leuven: Peters Press/Berdmans, 2007).
 27 000 The Tamil writer Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Sterling Pub Private Ltd, 1996), 61, 201.
 28 000 Tolle's earliest mystical influence: John W. Parker, *Dialogues with Emerging Spiritual Leaders*, 2nd ed. (New York: iUniverse, 2009), 93–122.
 29 000 "Salvation" consists of freedom: Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 72.
 30 000 You find God the moment: Ibid., 147.

EPILOGUE

- 28 000 In whatever way you find God: W 589.
 29 000 As William James already observed: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 379–80.
 30 000 Franciscan Richard Rohr: See, for example, Richard Rohr, *What the Mystics Know: Seven Pathways to Your Deeper Self* (New York: Crossroad, 2015).
 31 000 In Fox's Creation Spirituality: Fox, *ME: A Mystic-Warrior for Our Times*, xiv.
 32 000 "what a darkness we are involved in": John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), vol. 2, bk. 4, chap. 3, 222; cited in Marilynne Robinson, *The Givenness of Things* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Picador, 2016), 189.
 33S 000 As the author Marilynne Robinson: Robinson, *The Givenness of Things*, 84.
 34N 000 Immanuel Kant argued: From his *Critique of Pure Reason*, as quoted in <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-judgment/supplement1.html>.

000	Albert Einstein urged: William Hermanns, <i>Einstein and the Poet: In Search of the Cosmic Man</i> (Wellesley, MA: Branden Press, 1983), 108.	01
000	Some contemporary brain scientists: Iain McGilchrist, <i>The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World</i> (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 3–4.	02
000	Going deep within oneself: I especially wish to acknowledge my debt to Dietmar Mieth, <i>Die Einheit von vita activa und vita contemplativa</i> , a very thoughtful treatment of this subject.	03
000	Neglecting such core aspects: Flasch, <i>ME: Philosopher of Christianity</i> , 158.	04
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