

# MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Meister Eckhart, Marguerite Porete,  
Hadjewich of Brabant

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Meister Eckhart

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Paulist Press

# Meister Eckhart

- 1260-1328 AD.
- Dominican. Student of Albert the Great; contemporary of Thomas Aquinas. Professor of Theology at Cologne.
- While not treating scholastic theology as paganism in disguise, he deprecated scholastic realism as irrelevant to the birth of the Word in the soul.
- Eckhart returns to Augustine's appeal to experience. Eckhart remains in the tradition of the undivided Church.

- The importance of Aristotle to the development of Western thought cannot be underestimated. His ideas that knowledge can be gathered from the sensible world, analyzed, and categorized, gave birth to the scientific method.
- The scientific method is limited in principle to describing a part of reality only, that part that is beneath us in freedom and awareness. Scientific knowledge emerges only in the areas where scientists can control the materials and conditions with which they work. Transcendence is lost. Causation flows from below.

- One cannot reason to God.
- “The Father is the beginning of the divinity ...and out of this the Eternal Word proceeds and yet remains within, and the Holy Spirit flows...”
- The Word cannot exist without the breath or Spirit.
- When the Psalmist says (61:12), “God has spoken once and for all, and I have heard two things,” God’s speaking is the uttering of His Only-Begotten Word but the two things heard are the revelation of the divine Persons.

- Eckhart was condemned as a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church for speaking of the birth of the Word in the soul, a position consistent with the writings of the Fathers of the Church. He wrote, “When I think...that our nature has been exalted above all created things, and sits in Heaven above the angels, and is adored by them, then I must always rejoice in my heart, because Jesus Christ, my dear Lord, has made everything which is his possession my own.”
- John (3:35) writes, “The Father has given all things to me.” Paul, in Galatians (2:19-20), writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

- Eckhart was also condemned for writing, “All things work together for good...’Yes, even sins.” That citation coupled to Paul (Rom 8:28) is taken from Augustine: “Even our sins are necessary to the universal perfection which God established.”
- Eckhart understands that God alone is completely real in every sense. What is fully real in that which is other than God is God’s presence in it. A part of us, then, rarely evident, is continuous with God, while the balance remains categorically different. Through the “eye of the heart” (Eph 1:18), one can seek the God within us.

- In Eckhart's time the task of theologians was not to reveal truths about God as it was to frame the appropriate paradoxes that would serve to highlight the inherent limitations of our minds and to mark off in some way the boundaries of the unknown territory where God dwells. Theology was ordered to preaching and preaching to life.
- "Therefore, the Father speaks the Son always, in unity, and pours out in Him all created things. They are all called to return into whence they have flowed out. All their life and their being is a calling and a hastening back to Him from whom they have issued." (cf Zech 14:9)



- “He who lives in the goodness of nature lives in God’s love; and love has no ‘why’...There will be no divine work if a person does something that is not for God’s sake, because it will have a ‘why.’”
- To love in its truest sense is to love all things equally. When we love God above all things with our whole heart and soul, only then do we come to love ourselves and all other things truly and equally. (Eckhart was condemned for calling Peter’s “greater love” for Jesus as imperfect...Yet Peter never replied to Jesus question of unconditional love at Jo 21:15-17 that he loved Him unconditionally – agape.)

- Grace is the highest form of illumination, that which restores the order of man's faculties and conforms us to Christ and God. In becoming man, the first intention of the Word was directed to each individual believer and to the whole of sinful mankind. In taking up a human nature rather than a human person, the Word obliges us to love all persons equally and without distinction. We must love the human nature in them, not what is distinct, the personality.
- The saving mysteries themselves as well as their application to the believer are the work of grace...External religious practices, however, are indifferent and insufficient in themselves.

- The one religious practice absolutely essential for the return to God is detachment.
- “True detachment is nothing else than for the spirit to stand as immovable against whatever may chance to it of joy and sorrow, honor, shame and disgrace, as a mountain of lead stands before a little breath of wind. This immovable detachment brings a man into the greatest equality with God, because God has it from his immovable detachment that he is God, and it is from His detachment that He has His purity and His simplicity and His unchangeability.”

- “How can it be that separation of the understanding from form and image understands all things in itself, without going out from or changing itself?... The more purely simple a man’s self is in itself, the more simply does he in himself understand all multiplicity, and he remains unchangeable in himself.”
- “If Mary had not first given spiritual birth to God, he would never have been born bodily from her...’Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’ (Lk 11:28) It is more precious to God to be born spiritually from every ... good soul than that he was born bodily from Mary.”

- The Word is Son by nature; we are sons by adoption. He is the true image of the Father; we are made in the image. We are members of the Body of Christ.
- True freedom consists in detachment from things. This extends to exterior religious exercises, for those who “are attached to their own penances” cannot understand divine truth. “Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who is always hidden. But whoever seeks for God without ways will find Him as He is in Himself.” Christ must be imitated spiritually.

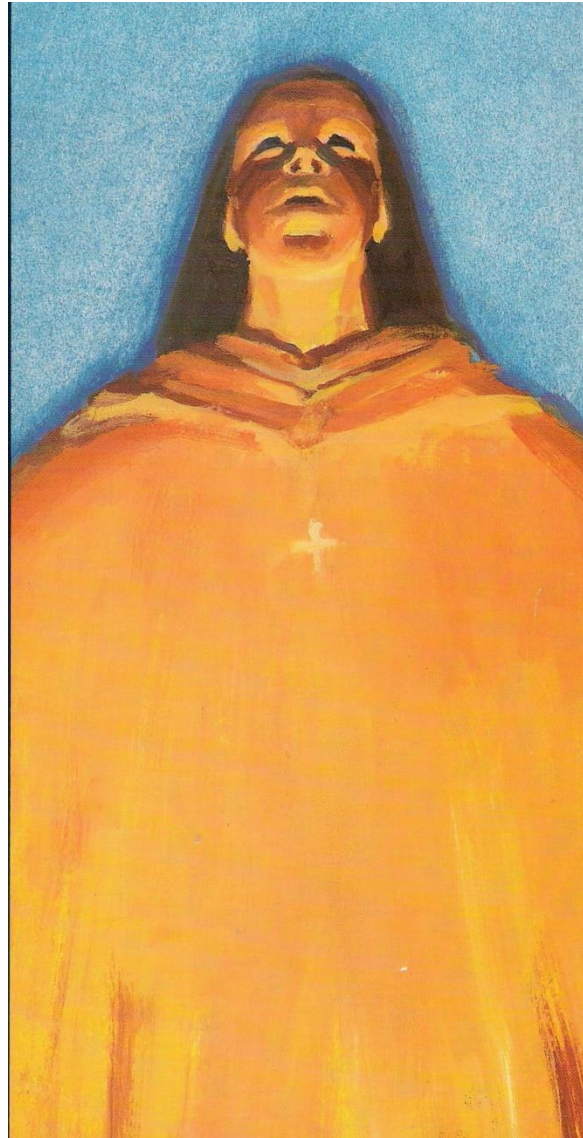
- “To a good man, insofar as he is good and born of goodness alone and an image of goodness, everything that is limited and created is of no value and a bitter sorrow and pain. And for him to be deprived of them is to be deprived of and freed from sorrow, affliction and loss.”
- “Take as humble a work as you like, whatever it may be, true obedience makes it finer and better...Obedience always produces the best of everything in everyone... In true obedience there should be a pure going out from what is yours.” Your will be done, Lord.

- “The most powerful prayer...is that which proceeds from an empty spirit...one that is confused by nothing, attached to nothing, has not attached its best to any fixed way of acting, and has no concern whatever in anything for its own gain.”
- “Let our intention be purely and only for God, and then truly He must perform all our works, and no person, no crowds, no places can hinder Him in all His works. In the same way, no one can hinder this man.”

- “The man who has God essentially present to him grasps God divinely, and to him God shines in all things.”
- “If a man thought rightly, and if he had the power to choose, he would not want to choose that his inclination to sin should die in him, because without it he would lack decision in everything...for it is the assault and the force of vice that brings virtue and the reward for striving.”
- Will must be surrendered to God to find God. (cf Acts 9:6)



- “The man who freely wants and is able to go to our Lord should as the first condition have a conscience free from every reproach of sin. The second condition is that his will be turned to God...The third condition is that his love for the Blessed sacrament and for our Lord ought to grow in him more and more.”



Marguerite Porete

Marion Miller  
Paulist Press

# Marguerite Porete

- Executed for heresy in Paris in 1310 AD.
- During the reign of Philip IV in France, at the height of Scholastic theological development, the Roman Catholic Church was troubled by itinerant evangelicals, principally women, living an extra-claustral life. The “Free Spirit” movement emphasized the individual reception of the Spirit and marginalized the role of the Church (and the sacraments). The movement was crushed through oppression, jail, and execution.

- Porete, not a Free Spirit, but Prioress of a Carthusian monastery, was suspect because of her writings. Theology, particularly, was a male domain. Her assertion that the soul's annihilation in divinity is more valuable than the vision of the Trinity granted to Paul in the third Heaven was problematic to her male judges.
- “Thinking no longer matters, nor work, nor speech. Love has brought me so high, (thinking no longer matters) with its divine regard that I have no understanding. Thinking no longer matters, no work, nor speech.”

- The soul is commanded to love, the death of mortal sin.
- The self is abased in mortification, the death of nature.
- The satisfaction of good works is sacrificed, the death of one's spirit.
- Then the soul begins to love.
- Self-will is sacrificed, and understanding is reached. Divine light is accessed.
- True humility is reached. Union is possible. The divine is seen in the mirror of the soul.

- God teaches the will what it must love so that the will is oriented towards the truth. As one love what one knows, the object of the will in turns governs knowing. Spiritual progress occurs as love and knowledge join together in mutual and reciprocal relation.
- “For the sake of God, behold the repentant sinner. (Mary, the sister of Lazarus) had no dishonor because of what Jesus Christ said to her, that she had chosen the better part and the most sure, and what is greater, that it would never be taken from her. And also she had no dishonor from the fact that her sins might be made known before all people...

- She had dishonor from no one, except those by whom she had been condemned. For she was overtaken, captured, and filled, and so she concerned herself with no one except Him.

What dishonor would Saint Peter have, since God resuscitated the dead in his shadow even after he denied God three times? Certainly he had no dishonor since he received great honor.

What shame and what glory did Saint John the Evangelist have, since God wrote through him the true apocalypse even after he had fled from the capture by which Jesus had been taken?

- I maintain...that he and the others had neither dishonor from this nor honor, nor the wish to hide or conceal themselves, and that it is of no concern to them that God might accomplish something through them, and for their sake and for the people, since it would be a divine work. These examples are sufficient for those who have the intellect to grasp what remains to be said. This ... is not written for others.”



- “The just man falls seven times each day. It means that insofar as the will of the just man is completely given over to the contemplation of the divine goodness without impediment, the body is feeble and tends toward defect...and thus is inclined often to give attention to lesser things than the goodness of God...this is a fall...But the will of the just man is kept from consenting to the defect...So such a fall ... is more virtuous for him than vice, because of his will...It is necessary he be lifted seven times...The soul lives by the peace of the gifts given to her (from) above.”

- Jesus told His Apostles, “It is necessary that I go away; and if I do not go away, you cannot truly receive the Holy Spirit,’ ... because they loved Him to tenderly according to human nature and feebly according to his divine nature.”
- “I considered Mary, when she sought Jesus Christ, our Savior, at the tomb and did not find Him. But she found there two angels who spoke to her, offering to comfort her. But Mary received no comfort ... Mary sought the true Sun who created the angels, and thus she could not receive comfort from the angels.”

- “Next I considered the supreme saint, that is the very sweet Baptist, and how he was sanctified in the womb of his mother, though it was not of concern to him. And I pondered in my amazement why it was that he showed Jesus Christ to two of his disciples so that they might follow Him, and yet he remained completely quiet. One cannot find that Saint John left the desert to go see Jesus Christ in human nature. This was sufficient to his status without his seeking Him. Divine Goodness accomplished Her works in him, Goodness who satisfied him without impeding him by seeking the humanity of Christ.”

- “And after this, I thought about when Jesus Christ went to see (John) in the desert, how John kept himself from holding onto Jesus Christ in His human person, and from following Him. Afterward, I considered that he preached about our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is said that Jesus Christ sat down and gave attention to the sermon of the very sweet Baptist, but the Baptist did not deviate from his intention, no more than he had before, so much had the divinity taken over his intention.”

- “Then I thought about when he baptized Jesus Christ, and in doing this he held God the Son, and so he heard the voice of the Father and so he saw also the Holy Spirit. To whom did he show this? Did he not hide it? Did he take pride in himself in this? Not at all. He had no concern about it except to please the One who accomplished such a work by His goodness.”
- “To whom did (the sweet Virgin Mary, who was so perfectly sanctified) show it, reveal it, or (from whom did she) hide it? No one. She had no account of such a work, nor did she hold on to it.”

- “Ah, Unity, says the soul grasped by divine Goodness, you generate unity, and unity reflects its ardor in unity...The memory possesses the power of the Father...the intellect possesses the wisdom of the Son ...the loving conjunction of the will possesses the goodness of the Holy Spirit...This conjunction places the soul in being without being which is Being...” who is love itself.



Hadewijch

Mother Placid  
Dempsey, OSB  
Paulist Press

# Hadewijch of Brabant

- 13<sup>th</sup> Century Beguine.
- The Beguines were devout women who chose to lead lives of apostolic poverty and contemplation without taking vows of nuns. The movement originated among the high born in Flanders. Their distinctive dress was a grey cloth. Many lived in community.
- Their independence was viewed with suspicion by the Roman Catholic Church.
- When Hadewijch was separated from her community, she was denounced to the Inquisition.



- “The Son ... imparted Christian fruitfulness to us who are called after His name, and who are fed with His name and with His Body, yes, and who partake of Him and consume Him eagerly, and fruitfully, and deliciously as we ourselves wish. But in this there is greater disproportion than between the point of a needle and the whole world with the sea thrown in. One could taste and feel incomparably more fruitfulness from God ... if he sought Him with desirous, loving confidence.
- Hadjewich’s visions occurred within the context of Liturgy, principally at communion.

- Love mysticism arose in the West in Flanders during the second half of the twelfth century.
- It is a predominantly feminine phenomenon and its essential hallmark is that union with God is lived here on Earth as a love relationship.
- There is a strong emotional and ecstatic character to love. The touch of Love also overthrows the minds and senses. The experience of oneness and Love go together with a psychological withdrawal from self. Yet, the non-ecstatic periods are also mystical: a loving knowledge more human and more refined.

- God is such that He allows Himself to be possessed in an intimate manner. This Beloved who gives Himself without reserve continues to exceed man: He is wholly the Other. He never takes away our humanity; on the contrary, He establishes us more deeply in our human existence: “You must live as man.” The imitation of the Man Jesus is “being-one” with God.
- “They who stand ready to content Love are also eternal and unfathomable. For their conversation is in Heaven, and their souls follow everywhere their Beloved who is unfathomable... Although they are loved with an eternal love, they are never seized by the ground of Love, just as they can never seize what they love.”

- “If it maintains its worthy state, the soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices ...and His own self-sufficiency ever finds fruition in this soul to the full, as the soul, for its part, ever does in Him. Soul is a way for the passage of God from His depths into His liberty; and God is a way for the passage of the soul into its liberty, that is, into His inmost depths, which cannot be touched except by the soul’s abyss. And as long as God does not belong to the soul in His totality, He does not truly satisfy it.”
- The human being truly dies in God, but not in order, as human being, to come to its end.

- “What amazes me about sweet Love is that Her sweetness conquers all things, and yet She subjugates me from within and so little knows my heart’s distress. She has brought me into such a woe, I feel I am not a match for it ... Sweet as Love’s nature is, where can She come by the strange hatred with which she continually pursues me and trans-pierces the depths of my heart with storm? I wander in darkness without clarity, without liberating consolation, and in strange fear.”
- In one’s tasting of the Other there is always hidden the tasting of oneself. Affection, then, may hinder us from knowing the Other as Other. Yet, “Love teaches with love...Love honors the loyal lover with love.”

- “He who conquers Love is vanquished Himself. So he is served; and when She cherishes anyone, She consumes ... all he owns. So, being old, he learns through the power of Love to conquer peace, where he discovers the price of Love in misery.”
- The “desire which I had inwardly was to be one with God in fruition. For this I was still too childish and too little grown-up; and I had not as yet sufficiently suffered for it or lived the number of years requisite for such exceptional worthiness.”
- God provides consolation. Then begins loneliness. Finally, one is confronted with the demand that surpasses all human measure: to follow Jesus fully. One then tastes everything that belongs to the concrete, disconcerting, human Humanity.

- “Reason errs in fear, in hope, in charity ... in tears, in ... devotion, in the bent for sweetness, in terror of God’s threats, in distinction between beings, in receiving, in giving – and in many things we judge good, reason may err.”
- “In hope many ... err by hoping God has forgiven them all their sins. But if in truth their sins were fully forgiven, they would love God and perform works of love. Hope leads them to count on things that never eventuate, for they are too lazy ...”
- “In charity men err ... when they give out of mere liking when there is no need, or render superfluous service...Often emotional attraction motivates what is called charity.”

- “In... all other things that do not belong to perfect love, reason errs...”
- “Learn to contemplate what God is: how He is Truth, present to all things; and Goodness, overflowing with all wealth; and Totality, replete with all virtues.”
- “The Countenance which He there made visible was invisible to the sight for all creatures who ever lived human and divine love in one single Being, and who could not grasp or cherish in the undivided taste the one nature.”



- “For each revelation I has seen partly according to what I was myself, and partly according to what I had been chosen for; but now I saw this and had attained that to which I was chosen: in order that I might taste Man and God in one knowledge, what no man could do unless he were as God, and wholly such as He was who is our Love.”
- “With the Humanity of God you must live here on Earth, in the labors and sorrow of exile, while within your soul you love and rejoice with the omnipotent and eternal God in sweet abandonment. For the truth of both the Humanity and the Divinity is in one single fruition.”

- We must first contemplate ourselves in God, and therefore learn to contemplate what God is, the Trinity.
- We live the life of the Trinity when we allow the irresistible power of the Father to work in us; the Holy Spirit, when we allow the His holy will to be done in us; and the life of the Son, when we allow ourselves to be enlightened by His radiance and truth. But when love predominates, and establishes us in simplicity, we can only love. The virtues then flow from the unity of our life.

- “It is man’s obligation to practice virtues ... solely out of homage to the incomparable sublimity of God, who created our nature to this end ... This is the way in which the Son of God took the lead, and of which He Himself gave us knowledge ... He perfectly accomplished, amid multiplicity, the will of the Father in all things and at all times.”
- We must “carry the Cross with the Son of God...to be crucified with Christ...to die with Christ.”

- “All ... will fall away from you and forsake you, and no one will be willing to wander about with you in your distress and in your weakness...”
- “Never did I dispel my griefs or my pains with the aid of my omnipotence...I won them at the price of sufferings and through my Father...”
- “The same kiss which beautifully unites the Three Persons in one sole Being” draws the soul as Bride.

- “There are two ways in which persons may help others. The first way consists in extending a hand to sinners in their overthrow. A man is sometimes so wounded by charity for others that he must renounce the fruition and blessedness of God for the sake of sinners who live in sin, preferring to be deprived of his Beloved until assurance is given him that these sinners are not despairing of God’s grace. Thus charity leads one man to help other men.”

- “The second way is this: When God knows that a certain man is sound in virtue and established in charity, God does not spare him. When He finds him strong...He does not let him slacken...or lose his strength through sweetness, so this man wishes rather to do without all he ought to have from God, if God does not succor sinners ... (to those who) can no longer return to God by their own strength ... He confides them to those strong souls ... in order that they may support and bring them back, in His name, to His ways where men love perfectly.”

- “The house of Jacob shall be a fire; the house of Joseph shall be a flame; the house of Esau shall be stubble.” (Obad 5:18)
- “The new secret heaven...is closed to all who never were Christ’s mother with perfect motherhood, who never wandered with Him in Egypt and on all the ways, who never presented Him when the sword of prophecy pierced their soul, who never reared that child to manhood and who, at the end, were not at His grave; for them it shall remain eternally hidden.”



Lorenzo Ghiberti  
North Doors (Life of  
Christ)  
Bronze  
Baptistry, Florence



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